

Imagine A World Based On Value

by Brenda Gustin

Presented to Parents of Friends of Grant Park

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You may be wondering why am I here tonight to share with you?

You may be wondering what my purpose is.

As a parent and as a educator, I wanted to share with you that I think the future of our children's education lies in the hands of parents. I feel that it is important for parents to look at their own values and begin asking or telling the schools to support their values. I think it is important for parents to take the time to figure out what it is they want from their child's school rather than the school telling the parents and children what they require.

People desire to be valued for who they are. To live knowing love, compassion, knowledge, justice, wonder and the knowledge that they are creators of their own lives.

Are we passing these values to our children? Are these values being taught in our schools and are children being allowed to discover that they are the creators of their lives?

Love: It's what we are all seeking. Not just personal love, but unconditional love. We long to feel and be able to express it toward ourselves and for others. Unconditional love is acceptance, respect and honoring one another for our uniqueness.

Compassion: The Dalai Lama, in his book, "*An Open Heart, Practicing Compassion in our Daily Lives*" says 'we should work at increasing and sustaining qualities like sharing with and caring for one another. We must also respect the rights of others.

Is the ability – the time – available to our children to practice this in their daily lives at school? During the seven or eight hours, most students spend in school, they are given five-minute breaks, are segregated by age and are given assignments that take over much of the family time at night and weekends. Where is the time to interact, learn and practice compassion?

Where is the time to think, process, and discuss all that occurs during their day? When are they allowed to hear from a variety of perspectives and figure out their place in the world?

We need school communities that allow time to weave the qualities of sharing and caring into every day life. Schools that value each individual, young and old, where respect and compassion is practiced, discussed, taught and learned by all ages. When we take time to practice these values, they become learned values and form life-long concern and value for those of similar and differing perspectives.

Knowledge: Of oneself, of others, of information, and I believe we accomplish this by allowing our children to study what interests them now. To be encouraged to run, skip and play, because it is valuable. I believe that each child's perspective is valuable to others.

Justice: Matthew Fox writes, "True compassion is justice, and justice requires study; it requires knowing the effects of our actions and decisions on other people – those different from ourselves – and on other beings."

We need to treat children as deserving to speak up on issues that concern their environment and how they wish to be treated by community members. We need to provide a real forum to create boundaries, to voice their attitudes, beliefs and perspectives. We must provide children with these opportunities and support their ability to create their own lives and be co-creators on this planet and to feel the power of justice.

Wonder: To wonder why, is one of the beauties of youth. Wonder leads to answers to the "why" questions. Knowing some of the "why", allows us to be more capable of accepting and administering justice. Children become more capable of compassion, love and expression of their own creativity.

It is important to offer children the time to ask why, or to even question "How do you know?"

Creativity: We are all creative and valuable. Creativity is not a product. It is not confined to art, music, dance, or poetry. Creativity is how we create each day.

The unique creativity we are each born with needs encouragement to exist in whatever form it takes. When we provide children with an environment where they are supported in creating their day, their month, and their year, they become students of life and create a life based on their unique interests and talents.

When we provide a school system where the whole child and person is acknowledged each day and not fragmented or disconnected from the totality of their life, we convey the message that they have value and are valued. Feeling valued supports self-love, increasing the capacity for a life lived with compassion, wonder and the desire to acquire knowledge and seek justice for oneself and others.

I again invite you to ask yourself whether you are enjoying life with your children. And if you are, I invite you to share with other parents how to do the same. If you are not enjoying life with your children, I ask you to speak openly with your children about how you can change their situation with them.

If your child shares situations from school that you can hardly believe, I ask you to ask more questions. Please don't discount their words! Many unbelievable things are taking place in our schools, and we need to listen to our children. We need to problem-solve with them. We need to empower them and look into other choices that may be available to change their situation.

There are a variety of options available to serve our needs and even though it may be inconvenient or challenging, we need to educate ourselves and become involved. In doing so, our children's lives (and those of others) can be enhanced, and they will not only be served better in their schooling environment, but they will see that their opinion, their voice, and their feelings are valued. They will see their parents stand for what is right for them. They will see that they are trusted, honored, respected, worthy and accepted for who they are. They will see that becoming educated is not something done only in a classroom. They will see that education occurs through involvement, through conflict, through research, through communication and through resolution. They will see that "Education is not a curriculum. Education is Life itself."

Biography:

Brenda Gustin is an Esoteric Educator, a Co-Founder and Staff Member at Sacramento Valley School, a Sudbury School, which supports children ages five through eighteen in pursuing individual, unique paths of learning unhindered by age segregation, fixed time tables for classes, compulsory testing and grade evaluations, to name a few.

It is located at 2737 Eastern Avenue (between Marconi and El Camino)

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