OPENING
Dr. Mary Heltsley
Dean College of Home Economics
University of Minnesota

We are here today to honor Gisela Konopka and her living legacy. The Gisela Konopka Lectureship Fund was established in her honor at the time that she retired, following thirty years with the University. She continues to take a very active interest in the Lectureship, both helping to select the speakers and keeping track of the many processes involved in planning and follow-up. Gisela Konopka was a Professor in the School of Social Work and Director of the Center for Youth Development and Research. She maintains close connections with the University, through her continuing lectures in the College of Liberal Arts and the annual Konopka Lectureship, which is sponsored by the Center for Youth Development and Research and the College of Home Economics.

Gisela is a specialist in adolescent development, especially the problems of troubled youth and adolescent girls. She has been instrumental in establishing treatment programs for troubled youth throughout the world. Gisa is a many-faceted individual, having a thorough appreciation of literature and the arts. It is through these media that, she says, she frequently reaches the most troubled adolescents and begins the healing process.

Her late husband, Paul, was an artist in his avocation and she has many examples of his works in her home. As many of you know, I am in my first year as Dean of the College of Home Economics. When I enter a new place such as this, I often feel deprived when I have not been able to meet and converse with the greats in our history. I feel deprived that I did not meet Paul and know of his warmth, love and talent that Gisa shares with us as she recalls her many memories of him. However, I do count as a blessing in my life, the chance to know Gisa Konopka and share her warmth, love and concern for mankind.

We salute you Gisa Konopka and honor you with this Lectureship bearing your name. Either directly or indirectly, you have had a great influence on the lives of the many people in Minnesota and around the world. We hope that we will carry on your dream of working with and for young people in our society. Let's applaud Gisa Konopka. Will you please stand.

INTRODUCTION
Dr. C. David Hollister
Director School of Social Work
University of Minnesota

We are very pleased to have Dr. Leon Chestang present this year’s Konopka Lecture. Dr. Chestang has been Dean and Professor of the School of Social Work at Wayne State University since 1981. Prior to this time, he was professor at the University of Alabama School of Social Work and earlier was a member of the faculty of the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration. Dr. Chestang received a Bachelor’s degree from Blackburn College, the Master of Social Work degree from Washington University and the Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

Leon Chestang came to the University setting following a broad background of service in public welfare agencies and private family counseling. He began his career as a child welfare caseworker, later becoming supervisor with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. He has also worked with the Chicago Association for Retarded Children, the Illinois Department of Public Aid and has been Director of Casework Services for Child and Family Services of Chicago. Dr. Chestang is well known for his work in the areas of racial and personal identity in the black experience, the coping strategies of minority families in the child welfare system, and for his work in the field of social work practice. Among his many consultancies are those with the Michigan Judicial Institute, the Division of Black American Affairs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the city of Detroit. He has testified as an expert witness on the relationships between discrimination and psychic injury, interracial adoption policy, and the psychosocial effects of housing discrimination.

Dr. Chestang has received many honors. Included among them are the Distinguished Alumni Awards from Washington University and from Blackburn College, the Distinguished Service Award from the Michigan State Social Workers Association, the Distinguished Visiting Commonwealth Professorship at Virginia Commonwealth University, and the Distinguished Visiting Lydia Rappaport Professorship from the Smith College School of Social Work.

Dr. Chestang will respond to questions following his presentation. The ushers in each aisle will collect your questions on notecards. It is now my great pleasure to present to you Dr. Leon Chestang, addressing the topic of “Raising Children who will Run the World.” Welcome Dr. Chestang.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
Dr. Leon W. Chestang

Thank you very much, Dr. Heltsley and Dr. Hollister, and to each of you who have come to honor dear Gisa. I must begin with a confession. The confession is that I think that I am smitten with...
I want to call attention to four developments which challenge our ability to rear children in ways which foster their most optimal development. In singling out these four changes in the context in which children are being reared, I make no claim that either singly or in combination, they account for the problems associated with child rearing in today's world. I claim only that they contribute significantly to the increased challenges faced by parents and society in nurturing and developing children in the modern world.

Rearing the next generation of public leaders, philosophers, healers and advocates is a large and complicated task because the demands of clear vision and thought and the imperative of decisive action are occurring in contexts in which many adults have had little or no experience.

The Changing Context of Child Rearing

The Women's Revolution

First, the number of women in the labor force has surpassed the number of women who remain at home. The latest figures reveal that 70% of the adult female population is in the labor force. If we assume, and it is reasonable to do so, that a significant number of these women are mothers, it follows that the number of children cared for outside of their homes is increasing. Further, the counsel of the movement to liberate women has been heeded by many females such that child rearing is but one option—and for some, not the most desirable—that a woman, married or single, might choose.

The effect of this change on both the demands of parenting and on the outcomes of childhood are enormous. This effect is epitomized by an informal study conducted a few years ago at the University of Chicago which revealed that over three hundred books on child care had appeared during the twentieth century. That figure is not startling considering the importance of the subject. What is startling about the figure is that these books were on the subject of how to raise children. Even the topic would not be unusual were it not for the fact that in the history of this country, child rearing is not thought to be a technology but an art. Child rearing was not seen as a science for experts but an art, founded on experience and common sense, practiced by parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles. In a word, child rearing was a social responsibility centered in the extended family and the neighborhood.

Since the publication of Dr. Spock's now famous book, child care has increasingly become the province of the experts. A few years ago, one could hardly turn on an early morning television talk show without hearing some new authority on child care pushing his or her new book. Ginot's Between Parent and Child and his follow-up book, Between Parent and Teenager sold in the millions. And not long ago, I received a telephone call from the Life Style writer for the Detroit Free Press asking my reaction to still another new book on teaching children to be assertive.

It is not at issue that some of these books provide useful information and support to many parents. What should be of interest to us who are responsible for the care of children is that these books signal a major shift in our social and cultural practices regarding child care. They suggest that the traditional roles and expectations of parents in regard to child care have changed. Equally important, they suggest that the character of the children whom we serve as social workers and teachers is significantly different from that which we have come to expect as a result of our education and our expe-
rience in our own families. (It should be emphasized that we are dealing with a phenomenon much more serious and far more profound than that captured in the commonplace observation that each generation is different. What we are facing is a major transition if not a revolution in childhood experiences and behaviors.) Witness the nearly one million annual rate of births to teenagers some of whom are hardly more than children themselves. Witness the rampant and saddening number of violent crimes committed by youngsters. Witness also the nearly 45% school dropout rate in some of our central city schools; and witness the once shocking now commonplace television pictures of nine to twelve year olds selling hard drugs on the streets, youngsters whose actions are encouraged in some cases, by their own parents. I have left aside epidemic poor school performance, childhood suicide, and homeless and runaway children and youths.

Thus, the lessons learned in our own childhoods and in professional schools are being challenged by contemporary social and technological forces which render our children strangers in their own homes. In its effort to cope with these developments, the American family is under stress. Modern industry and urbanization have combined to raise our incomes and lure us to the cities where for many people the quality of life has been enhanced. In so doing, however, modern industry and urbanization have conspired with social changes to decrease the amount of time families have to be together and to increase our distance from family and friends and thus family ties are diluted.

**Television**

If it is not the most serious, television is certainly the most prevalent interference with the nurturing of families. We all know too well the frequent—and I think sometimes unjust—criticisms of television. The recent litigation against a network by a mother who charged that her son was influenced by TV to murder an elderly woman is a case in point. Still another example is the case involving the sexual assault of a child by a group of teenagers. Both of these cases involve serious acts requiring our most urgent and immediate action. The fact remains, however, that I am less concerned about television teaching children to commit heinous crimes than I am with its interference with the nurturing function of families.

When the family babysitter is the TV screen and when the mother is more concerned with the outcome of “Days of Our Lives” than with the outcome of each day of her child’s life, then the care of young children suffers. Under such circumstances, it may be more reasonable to assume that the problem of childhood crime is explained less by learning from TV than a failure to learn at mother’s knee. It is after all, at mother’s knee that the child first learns to love and to care, to value human life, and to respect others.

**Child Care**

Another social invention which can interfere with the nurturing function of the family is the commercial nursery sometimes euphemistically referred to as a “Child Development Center.” Again, these centers serve an important function. It is more desirable, after all, for children to be left in the care of responsible adults than to be left alone. And in fairness it must be said that some do a very fine job in preparing young children for school. The issue regarding commercial nurseries is a matter of quality. Too many provide only custodial care, and because access to them is so easy, they serve to further erode the quality of family life, and a few are actually damaging to children.

A child needs the family through all stages of development, but the young child especially needs his family. The trends I have discussed so far lead me to conclude that the family is giving too little, too late, to children in this age group. What we are seeing is a growing emphasis on the role of the school in children’s lives. This problem has been the subject of much discussion in recent years. Let us examine some of the salient points of this discussion.

**The School as Parent**

The debate about the role of the school in the lives of children can be summarized under the heading “The school as parent.” Parents argue that the school is not doing its job (as in teaching the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic) or that it is doing more than its job (as in sex education). Teachers and school officials counter that parents are not doing their jobs (as in sending children to school ill fed and ill clothed) or that they are expecting too much of the schools (as in the teaching of manners, discipline and the social graces). There are probably other points of contention between parents and teachers, but the fact, pointed out by a well known professor of community organization and planning at Brandeis University, remains: The school is the basic socializing agent in the community. The school’s province has gone beyond the three R’s. The school is the place where values are taught, where the norms of one’s society are learned, and where one’s sense of self-esteem and pride are nurtured or interfered with. The school as parent is a fact of life today, at least in a number of significant ways. This trend may be reversible, but I doubt it.

The increased expectations and demands upon the school have not been met with resources and competencies to match them. Schools all over the country are over crowded. Academic performance suffers, assaults on teachers and damage to property is increasing. Teachers in some schools are asking for combat pay; others require medical care for a syndrome their physicians say parallels battle fatigue. If this situation has not reached the school that your own kids attend, the experts say that it is likely to in the future, if current trends continue.

No more needs to be said in order to make the point that the school is hardly any better at parenting than parents. Our schools need help. We can lament the deplorable conditions existing in our schools; we can criticize the poor teaching that occurs in many quarters; and we can feel sadness or fear about the behavior of students in our public schools, but we cannot turn back the clock. The role of the school will remain as I have described it for some time to come. A more useful approach on all our parts, would be to begin to deal with how we can help the school.

This is but a brief summary of some of the elements of the changed context in which child development is occurring. It is enough, however, to make clear that the old and familiar authoritarian and didactic methods of the past are inadequate to the chal-
lenge before us. This is true if only because the authoritarian approach cannot work when parents and teachers are not the only authorities to whom our children are exposed. (Theo Hustable and Gary Coleman are authorities now!) It is also true because the specific instructions adults give are likely not to jibe with the child’s actual experiences. Moreover, when there is a discrepancy between adult advice and peer preferences, children are more likely to lean toward the preferences of their peers.

In spite of all of this, these children in their turn, just as we did in ours, will run the world. And in spite of the complexity of the challenge, we are still obliged to prepare them for the future.

Since we are not likely to be successful following the old methods of “do as I say do”, how should we approach the task?

**A Framework for Child Rearing**

I suggest that what we need is a framework for child development which promises to provide our children with the emotional, social and cognitive skills that will equip them to deal with the current context of their lives and prepare them for contexts yet unknown. I would further suggest that such a framework should contain at least four elements: hope, self-esteem, competence, and wholesome models. In the remainder of my remarks, I will elaborate this framework specifying the processes by which these elements can be fostered.

Hope is said to be at the center of human motivation and the foundation of human achievement. Hope is neither an emotion nor a skill. It is a sense, an abiding sense of optimism, based on belief that what is desired will occur. Hope is anchored in a person’s prior experience, in the person’s successes and achievements. It is acquired over time and must be reinforced by people who are important to the person. But hope as I am defining it must seem to you like a very adult, exceedingly mature sense. If my definition strikes you that way, I would agree with your assessment.

For the child, hope has its origins in trust, that innocent faith young children have that their parents will love them, protect them, and provide for them. It finds expression in childhood assertions that “my daddy can beat your daddy” or “my mommy is prettier than your mommy.” It is also based on the childish conviction that parents are larger than life.

These convictions do not spring up from nowhere. They are the result of caring and supportive interactions between parents and children begun at birth and continued throughout childhood. Thus, it becomes clear that the family is the basic contributor to the sense of trust which results in that abiding sense of optimism which is the essence of hope.

“We have all heard of hope before,” you may be thinking. Every preacher and inspirational speaker worth his or her salt talks about hope. Why is it so special for children who will run the world? It is so special because without hope, people not only perish, they lack motivation, they refuse to learn, they lack ambition, they are reluctant to see a task through to completion. Equally important, children without hope are flawed in their capacity for deep and meaningful relationships. Without this capacity all activity whether human interaction, play or work become superficial and devoid of meaning.

Because hope is so important it is necessary to say specifically how it may be acquired. Hope is acquired first of all, through participation in shared family activities. Such activities may involve recreation or work which provides the child with pleasure and inner contentment. Such activity, then, fosters a benign childhood. This point is especially noteworthy as it pertains to black children for many of whom childhood is a period of heavy responsibilities. Contrary to the experience of children who have carried such responsibilities, many other children portray their childhood in a more benign fashion. For example, Marian Anderson, the well known black contralto, recalled the following experience:

*Our big outing each year was a trip to the Barnum and Bailey Circus. To us it was like a great journey away from home. We prepared for the day long in advance: it was the next biggest day to Christmas. Father would always buy us something new to wear. A basket or two was prepared, and off we went, taking a trolley car for what seemed an endless ride (p. 9).*

Consider also her recollection of her feelings while helping her mother in the kitchen:

*Most often . . . I sat at the table . . . beating out some sort of rhythm with my feet and la-lala-ing a vocal accompaniment . . . Some people would say that these were the first signs of music in me. I would only say that I felt cozy and happy (p. 9).*

Work too, can provide the kind of shared activity that builds relationships on which hope is based. Consider this memory from another person who became a successful writer:

*Having time, to me, was the happiest time of the year. As soon as my brother, Tom, got in a few days with the mower, our whole family took to the field. We arose early, while the air was still cool before the sun was up and drove to the bay land we bad rented (p. 41).*

It is not only parents who can engage with children in the meaningful joint activities that I am describing here. Members of the extended family, especially grandparents, but any caring adult for that matter, can contribute to the child’s development of hope. Consider a memory of one of Alabama’s famous daughters, Angela Davis:

*Going to the country, to the green open space of the cotton and tobacco fields, was my own vision of paradise. I loved to chase the chickens barefoot, ride the horses bareback, help take the few cows to pasture in the early hours of the morning. The only amusement available that was totally unrelated to work on the farm was the refreshing swims in the nearby creek . . . the exerting trips into the swamps to explore this wonderful world inhabited by bizarre, crawling, slimy creatures (p. 81).*

The point of all this is that shared family activities—doing things together such that the child experiences his family as loving, the world as secure, and the self as a contributor to the family en-
terprise—make for a sense of confidence in the self and the environment. In this way trust grows into hope, hope into self-confidence, and confidence gives rise to the capacity to assume vital roles in later life.

Like hope, self-esteem is another familiar ingredient the experts tell us is needed for effective functioning in life. I will not belabor the issue here except to clarify its importance to my theme. Pride and self-respect are at the heart of self-esteem. Pride—the sense of one’s value and worth—involves the knowledge that one is better than no one but infinitely superior to everyone. Self-respect involves holding the self in high regard such that one’s thoughts and actions are of a nature that reflects positively on the mental picture the person has of him or herself.

In a word, pride and self-respect consist of a sense of personal worth and behavior that accords with this sense. Can these raw materials of self-esteem be talked about more concretely? And I answer, yes, I think I can.

Self-esteem is concretized through achievements valued as significant by others. Put more simply, this means that the child must have the opportunity to perform some activity or task through which he or she can derive the respect and acknowledgement of valued people in the social environment.

An important aspect of self-esteem is identity, the sense that the self is constant, that events occurring in the present do not basically alter the sense of self acquired over the years. Events of the present contribute to identity by expanding it, but they do not make the person over. The process of identity development is a subtle one in which each new occurrence is blended with those that exist such that a person’s view of him or herself is broadened.

A stable sense of identity is best understood by comparing it to a fragmented identity in which the person, unsure of who is the real me is pulled and pushed, buffeted and torn by each downfall or achievement, success or failure, compliment or attack. When identity is stable such occurrences become only momentary, temporary set backs, not profound events which shake the person at the foundation.

It has been said that competence is the sense that one knows how to do something and how to do it well. The feeling of competence is not something one gains in a moment. It is a sense of one’s capacities and abilities gained over time. It is an accumulation of many little successes in a variety of situations and it may involve a range of activities. Put very simply, it is knowing how to do the right thing at the right time, and to do it skillfully.

Competence is usually specific. A child may be competent in reading, or in playing the piano, or in expressing him or herself orally or in writing. It may involve athletic ability or the exquisite muscular coordination of the champion ice skater or the graceful movements of the prima ballerina.

It is not necessary to say more about what competence is. What may be more important is the nature and the context of environments that contribute to competence. By environment, I mean all of those people and circumstances that make up the whole which surrounds the child’s development: parent, home, brothers and sisters, school, neighborhood and church. But even this listing is incomplete for the whole includes the parents’ place of employment, the government, local, state, and national. The nature of each of the elements can be critical factors in the child’s development of competence. The point of all this is simple: There is a connection between the child’s development and the environmental conditions in which he and those important to him function.

For example, a child’s ability to learn to read in the primary grades may depend no less on how he is taught than the existence and the nature of ties between school and home. A well-known child psychologist has said, “The development potential of a setting is enhanced when the supportive links consist of others with whom the developing person has developed a primary dyad (the child’s father visits the day care center) and who engage in joint activity and primary dyads with members of the new setting (the child’s mother and teacher are bridge partners).”

That is a very powerful observation. a) It makes the common-sense point of the importance of parental involvement; b) It highlights the social and political considerations of knowing people in high places.

Another important aspect of environment as it relates to competence is contained in the following proposition. “Children from cultural backgrounds that encourage the formation and maintenance of transcontextual dyads are more likely to profit from new developmental experiences.” Now our psychologist friend has used some very fancy words to make a point which will be familiar to you. Let me say it very simply; it helps to form relationships with people who are different from oneself, and it is useful to get involved in situations with which you are unfamiliar: a) People whose knowledge and experiences are similar to your own can’t teach you very much; b) Staying in the same old place, doing the same old things, contributes very little, if anything, to one’s growth and development. Learning to do the right thing at the right time with skill, which is to say learning to be competent, is a matter not only of native abilities, intelligence, and skills. It involves the whole situation in which the developing person functions.

The last ingredient, and by no means is it the least important, is the necessity of wholesome models. A lot has been written and said about models and their impact on child development. What I want to emphasize is the process by which these models convey their lessons to the developing child. It may be appropriate to say the model conveys his or her support (and if it were not too melodramatic, I would say soul) to the developing person. This role, unlike the image it suggests, is not passive. On the contrary, it suggests that the social worker is a dynamic presence engaged with and observed by the client. The client’s identification with the model is the process by which the desired response is accomplished. For many black and minority group youths, wholesome models may be in short supply. The availability of caring, adult models can, therefore, make a much needed contribution.

The process of modeling is not always intentional for the observer or the person being observed. Even when a model intends to represent a certain attitude or behavior, other aspects of the
model’s attributes may claim the attention of the observer. Thus, it behooves the model to be sensitive to the potential for intended and unintended effects on the client.

Bandura has offered several hypotheses about modeling which deserve mention.

1. The acquisition of imitative responses is affected by whether or not the model is rewarded for his or her acts.
2. Learning is more likely to occur when the organism wants or needs to obtain a certain goal.
3. Subjects are more likely to imitate the behavior of prestigeful than nonprestigeful models.
4. Models who are similar to the subjects themselves have a greater effect on behavior than dissimilar models.

The implications of these principles for clinical practice in general are clear, but some observations about their special relevance to minority clients is warranted.

The first principle addresses the potency of the subject’s observation of whether or not the model is rewarded for his acts. This principle can illuminate the failure of some subjects to emulate their parents’ normative behavior when this behavior has failed to produce improvements in the parents’ social status. It also clarifies why some children reject their parents’ convictions about the work ethic when the parents’ wages are meager and their status low. This principle suggests that social intervenors seek either to help such children come into contact with models who are rewarded for their actions or themselves become models for their clients.

The second principle points to the relationship between the promise of goal achievement and learning. What the model can do in this regard is help the child to see the relationship between a particular behavior and the child’s goal. This relationship is not always obvious to the child.

The last two principles explain themselves. Helping the child to find opportunities to interact with prestigeful models becomes the educator’s challenge. Such persons need not necessarily have achieved super-star status. The challenge is to find accessible people in the child’s environment. The child’s encounter with prestigeful people can occur by proxy, such as through books and the media. The educator’s task is to facilitate the encounter.

The observation that models who are similar to the subjects have a greater effect on the subjects stimulates what for some is the disconcerting issue of the effectiveness of social workers whose race or ethnicity differs from those whom they serve. That argument cannot be resolved here, but the observation about the positive effect of similarity should not be surprising. It is consistent with what we know about human nature, and, in the context of this discussion, it is reasonable in the light of the dual experience of blacks and other minorities. Still, it must also be pointed out that for a given client at a given time, the possibility of rewards or goal achievement or prestige may be the dominant motivator. Thus, the issue of the model’s similarity may be of lesser significance in the client’s availability to a model.

Exposing the child to new experiences can serve to enrich the child’s life and to broaden his or her experiences. This aspect of help is beneficial because of limitations in the client’s own immediate environment. When the adult shares information about places he or she has traveled or accompanies the client on visits to interesting places in the larger community, the child learns perhaps for the first time about things, places and opportunities which may have been only fantasized before. This kind of exposure can heighten motivation to match the educator’s experience or open up possibilities that the child thought closed to him or her.

The last role of the social intervenor identified in the study was the advocate/broker role. In this role the educator consciously and aggressively seeks to “open doors” for the child. This activity may consist of helping the student to find a job or an apartment, gain admission to or receive financial aid at a university, or deal with a landlord or a utility company. The point is that through such activities as these the social worker translates caring into action. In this way the relationship is enhanced and concrete client problems are dealt with.

Children who will run the world will need hope, self-esteem, competence and wholesome models. They need these attributes and people throughout their lives but especially when they are young. Children who will run the world need to be able to see clearly, think clearly and act decisively. Children who can do these things are not the technicians who can do one thing well or whose skills are limited to one area. Doing these things is a style, a way of being, an outlook, a structure of character. In the event that you have missed the point of what I said, I am now able to say this whole speech in one sentence borrowed from Urie Bronfenbrenner in answering the question, “What do children require for their most optimal development?” A child needs, he said, an enduring, reciprocal, irrational relationship with one person over time in which they engage in increasingly complex activities through which the child acquires skills which he/she takes out into the world.

An enduring relationship is one that goes on for a long time. A reciprocal relationship suggests that the interaction is two-way. The child and the adult contribute something. By an irrational relationship he said that he could only say that someone has to be crazy about you. This is what our children need, and stable families—single parent and otherwise—offer the greatest possibility for our children to be involved in such relationships.

It is our challenge to guide them, teach them, and aid their families in making it possible for them to assume adult roles of leadership in their turn, as we have in ours.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How do we deal with cynicism? We see so much of it, yet hope is necessary. When the individuals who are the role models and are the ones who are so prominent in the lives of children offer so little to them, what kind of structures can we provide to give hope to children?

The question is: “How can we deal with cynicism, particularly when some of the people in leadership positions do not themselves seem to possess the kind of character that would point toward the developments that I have been talking about.” One of the things that parents often say to children, when they come home with a
new idea that they have discovered in some other home, and report that, “Well, they do it across the street,” is to reply, “Yes, but that is not the standard in this place.” I think what that suggests for us in relation to the matter of cynicism, is that if we can have at least a place, at least a person, a context, in which some clear values and clear standards are upheld—without, of course, becoming fanatical about them—that can serve to buffer our youngsters against the vicissitudes of the kinds of experiences and values to which they are going to be exposed, and the various places in which they will find themselves. Again, there has to be base, because I remain convinced that what is laid down during that most formative period—and it is pretty much established, as much as we criticized it some years ago—that a lot happens in the first three to six years of life, a lot of very important things. Not that it is irreversible, but that important things happen, things that people seem always to get back to when the time comes. It might look like a duck, because ducks are all that’s known, but when it sees or hears an eagle soaring, if its truly an eagle, it somehow has to leave “duckdom.” And I think our young people will do the same.

How do we offer sustained role models when most of them are electronic?

Well, those aren’t all bad. But, certainly, they aren’t adequate to the task for many youngsters. I think that those of us in institutional settings, that is, organizational settings, need to make possible, contact between our youngsters and real live models. I have heard of some very exciting programs where people have put youngers in touch with adult models, having first derived from them, commitments to spend time, to be invested in, and be involved with the young people. A member of my faculty, I am pleased to report, has developed a project that is related to the ‘Adopt-a-School’ program that many of you may know about. One of the things that he has done is to meet with the alumni, many of whom are distinguished citizens today, and ask them not only to endow the program, but to become models for the youngsters. And he has succeeded. People were coming up in long limousines-volunteering; other people, of course, came in tiny cars-volunteering. Models are there. The reason that I mention this kind of experience is because of the shift in demographic patterns in our communities. We don’t have the diversity in neighborhoods that was once there, so now we have to make it happen.

Throughout your speech, you’re referred to the responsibilities of mothers. Must we give up our expectations of fathers, especially black fathers?

That’s cultural. By all means, no, we must not give up our expectations of fathers, black, white, or otherwise. I mention mothers, though, because of the centrality and the primacy of the mother. I think it is a waste of time to argue against that point. I mean, it gets a little bit ridiculous, you know, to argue against that point. But only because of centrality and primacy, do I use the language that I use, not in terms of role function. Fathers can be as nurturing to youngsters, but are not likely to be as available for many families because of the structure of society at this point. For some families, where that’s possible, it is to be highly endorsed.

But, no, by all means, I think the role of fathers increasingly has been shown to make significant contributions to child development. Indeed, there are many books and essays written on the subject. So I strongly endorse it.

What, in your view, explains the decline in group/club programs in churches, schools, YMCA, etc? Do you think it’s important that such youth group work be redeveloped to balance a clinical approach?

One of the things I’d be interested in, is hearing from the person who raised that question about any ideas which he or she has along those lines. Yes, I do think that we need to find ways to restimulate groups in a more institutionalized fashion. I think part of that problem, though, in terms of their decline, stems from that same demographic change in neighborhoods and communities; many people who are in leadership positions in such groups are no longer available or accessible. Another development, of course, is the shift in our whole social environment, in which we started to depreciate group involvements. I was sharing with Ms. Erickson earlier that I happen also to be an Eagle Scout and attribute much of what I know—I have even said to my faculty about “cleaning”—as having been learned in the Boy Scouts. (They often wonder if I mean that I’m going to take them on a hike!) In any case, I think such programs have played vital roles in many of our lives. What we have to do is devise strategies so that we can make some of those things happen in a new context. The context will not be the same.

Speaking of context, how do you instill hope in youth who are in an environment of poverty?

The pressures of poverty, the stresses of poverty, of course, have to be reduced to some level of “bearability” before one can begin to start talking about these higher levels of aspiration and achievement. But again, as young people see colleagues and peers—and I have seen some fascinating essays and discussions about youngsters in various communities across the country who have seen people they knew, make it out, succeed, and do better—it inspires them to believe that “If they can do it, I can do it.” But one must first have a floor, and I suppose that means not being hungry, not wondering where the roof will be tonight, not being so abused and ashamed that one does not have at least some minimal level of similarity to one’s peers as one moves about the school. That has to be there, before other beginnings can be made.

A member of the audience appreciates your emphasis on the person who really cares about children and youth, but is disheartened at the attitude seen among some educational administrators regarding inspiring teachers. How do we continue to function as caring teachers and models for youth in an atmosphere that is sometimes discouraging of that kind of innovative, caring approach?

I suppose the first thing we have to do is to help those administrators who haven’t seen the light, to see it. It is very clear, as I’ve said, that authoritarian, didactic modes of investment won’t do it. Teachers who have found ways of encouraging people to learn—to do things differently—not only need to be rewarded, but given a wider forum, a wider arena in which to exhibit their prowess. I think
we can do that to some extent through social policy, both at local and state levels. We could begin to foster something we might simply call “new schools,” because we really do need new schools to adapt to this changing environment. We keep doing things as if we were still working in the close-knit neighborhood with the extended family, with a diversity of income groups, but these are not there in many instances. And where they are there, we may still need new schools because of the changing value context. So, if legislatures and local boards of education begin to foster these kinds of developments, I think that will at least begin to open the doors.

How do we deal with children who are developmentally delayed, or who don’t have families, or who are in substitute care—group homes, foster care and so forth? What can we offer to them?

Of course, we have all heard of working with people to help them reach the maximum of their potential. I think we must never forget that, as a guiding principle. The families—birth families, foster families, adoptive families—who are invested in these youngsters should be supported in every way that is possible. This includes handicapped youngsters as well. Maybe the first thing that we can offer them is an absence of our own prejudice. I am often reminded of an occasion when I was Director of Casework in an agency that specialized in foster care and adoption. We had an eight year old who had an IQ of about 140 or 145 and the only couple that we had available was blind—both the husband and wife. The social worker was a little disturbed about our consideration of this blind couple for this child. I will always remember my colleague, who was Director of Foster Care in the agency, when she replied to the worker who had said: “But this kid is a genius, what’s he going to do with these blind people?” She said: “He could read to them.” And he was placed. I checked ten years later, when he was 20, and he hadn’t been hurt, and he was doing well. So first, our own prejudices or stereotypes need to be surrendered. Then we need to be supportive of families who are doing what they know how to do best.

REFERENCES


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