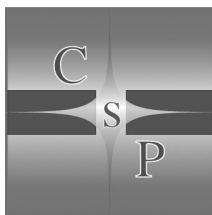


Enriching the Lives of Children

Enriching the Lives of Children:
Creating Meaningful and Novel Stimulus
Experiences to Promote Cognitive,
Moral and Emotional Development

By

Rosalyn M. King



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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Rosalyn M. King

ABSTRACT

This book is a theoretical discussion on enriching the lives of children. It examines the research on promoting and enhancing cognitive, moral and emotional development in children. It is a state of the art assessment of the theories, explanations and strategies proposed or implemented relative to the topic and research findings.

Distinctions are made between the traditional descriptions of enrichment versus constructivists' notions about enrichment. Discussion also includes other cognitive and cognitive developmental theorists' explanations and models, along with suggested methodologies for educationally and personally enriching and stimulating the lives of children. The research principally investigates the use of authentic and innovative pedagogy and practice as a way of making meaningful and holistic connections to enliven children's learning.

Discussion includes the historical backdrop of the study, theoretical propositions in support of enriching children's lives, learning and the developmental domains, including a discussion of cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development; and the relationship between creativity and development. Further, an examination is made of the research literature to find interesting structures and strategies for creating novel stimulus experiences for children, and includes a discussion of potentially impactful concepts.

Finally, an overview of selected program models assessed by this researcher as innovative, novel or workable in their approach and application toward stimulating children's educational and personal development are presented and discussed. These models are also presented in a typological framework.

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

This book explores ways to maximize the lives of children and to enhance their growth and development by advocating for the provision of meaningful, novel, stimulating, and enriching experiences as part of the teaching and learning process. The ultimate goal of these strategies should be to promote cognitive, moral, and emotional development in student learners. I am particularly interested in exploring the types of enrichment experiences currently in existence or proposed in the research literature that would have the above stated end results in children.

Over the decades, there have been two main streams of philosophy and practice permeating education—traditionalist mainstream notions about education and those who advocate for more alternative or innovative approaches to mainstream strategies. Likewise, relative to enrichment programs for children, one can find the more traditional approaches being used to provide support to development of the basic skills of reading, writing, math, verbal abilities, and so on. There are also the traditional enrichment programs around subject matter content such as math and science particular career development enrichment programs. For many of us, these more traditional approaches to education have been the norm. However, many educators would say that these notions are no longer as effective as perhaps they were in the past. They would argue that today's educational systems include a different breed of students with differing and varied interests, abilities, and attention spans; and, many of these students are more global in scope and perspective based on societal, national and world interests, areas of focus and overall growth and development of the nation and world. What becomes imperative to investigate is how the current paradigm might change to reflect the transitions and challenges we confront in the 21st century, with the changing face and perspectives of students worldwide. Questions to be pondered are some of the following:

- What reforms have been made and what further reforms are needed since the call for educational reforms in the 1970s?

- How can we create classrooms that are exciting and stimulating places for students to be?
- Is there a possibility that the traditional modes and the alternative innovative modes can meet?
- How do we transition from the more traditional modes of teaching to dynamic models of teaching and learning that truly stimulate and motivate student learning?
- Over the past two decades, who has developed or implemented innovative theories, explanations, or model programs addressing the importance of enriching the lives of children and targeting developmental domains?
- What key elements are being espoused as important?
- What are the interesting and novel models being implemented and tested?
- Are model programs having successful results?
- Is there conclusive evidence as to the effectiveness of programs being developed; and, are they designed to enrich the lives of children in meaningful and positive ways? What specific developmental domains are addressed?
- What are the gaps in understanding, research and types of programs needed?

This is the challenge of education in every decade, in every century. A response to these and other questions is the major impetus for this exploration. Further, this researcher would like to know the true nature of the state of affairs relative to educational programs designed to enrich the lives of children. Moreover, it would be helpful to provide a synthesis of those providing futuristic thinking and developing new and innovative approaches and proposals about teaching and learning toward these ends. The current call for reforms in education are advocating for teaching for understanding, meaning, connection to the student and a holistic approach to educating children, adolescents and others.

Historical Reflections

In the middle to latter 1970s, educator, John Goodlad, reported that schools and classrooms were some of the most boring places for students to be (1977). Goodlad spent thousands of hours studying schools and classrooms and began calling for reforms. In addition, more than twenty years ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), developed a report entitled *A Nation at Risk* and called for reforms in

education. The Commission indicated that American education faced a rising tide of mediocrity unless actions were taken to raise expectations and achievement. In reviewing education initiatives over the past decades, many believe this goal has yet to be realized. Diane Ravitch, educational historian and research professor, indicates the changes wrought by twenty years of task forces, committees, and study groups have not produced the hoped-for improvement in student achievement; and, few of the Commission's recommendations were properly implemented and did not bring about effective educational reform (2003). She reveals that a new report from the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education at the Hoover Institution concludes that it is now time to go beyond the recommendations set forth by the National Commission in 1983. This new task force is calling for a reinvigorated reform agenda for schools, with the choice of bringing flexibility and innovation as to how education is provided. Further, they call for a transparency to reveal information about how the education system is working; and, accountability to demonstrate that children are learning. According to Ravitch, the real issue remaining is whether schools will be "good enough" to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

Some believe we can have the best of both worlds—traditionalism and innovation and one researcher coined the term "innovative traditionalism" (See Ferrero 2006). Yet, others believe that even with failing reforms the United States remains the superpower, dominating the world, and is the most scientifically and technologically advanced nation. Further, they believe that perhaps the reforms were trying to fix a problem that really was not broken (Zhao 2006). Zhao believes that the reform initiatives neglected to focus on providing students with a curriculum that focuses on international issues that actively engages them in global affairs and provide a lack of opportunities for impoverished children to participate in current and future globalization discourse.

Table 1.1 presents an overview of education's ideological divide as described by Ferrero (2006).

TABLE 1.1 Education's ideological divide

| TRADITIONAL | INNOVATIVE |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Standardized Tests</i> | Authentic Assessment |
| <i>Basic Skills</i> | Higher-Order Thinking |
| <i>Ability Grouping</i> | Heterogeneous Grouping |
| <i>Essays/Research Papers</i> | Hands-on Projects |
| <i>Subject-Matter Disciplines</i> | Interdisciplinary Integration |
| <i>Chronology/History</i> | Thematic Integration |
| <i>Breadth</i> | Depth |
| <i>Academic Mastery</i> | Cultivation of Individual Talents |
| <i>Euro centrism</i> | Multiculturalism |
| <i>Canonical Curriculum</i> | Inclusive Curriculum |
| <i>Top-down Curriculum</i> | Teacher Autonomy/Creativity |
| <i>Required Content</i> | Student Interest |

Source: Ferrero 2006.

The Meaning of Enrichment

Even though we freely use the word “enrichment” and call many of our educational programs “enrichment programs,” in-school, after-school or Saturday academies, no formal definition could be found of the concept. The word, “enrich” has been described in some of the following ways: “*to add greater value or significance to;*” “*to improve in quality or productivity (as by adding desirable ingredients);*” “*to supply with riches or wealth*” (Random House Webster’s College Dictionary); “*to make rich or richer*” (The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary); “*to improve the quality or value of;*” *to make wealthy or wealthier*” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary).

For the purposes of this paper, *enrichment* is defined as:

“Improving the quality and value of one’s life through nurturance and development of one’s human potential by provision of stimulating experiences that energize the individual to act in positive and productive ways; and, with the end result being enhanced growth and development that leads to a higher quality of life, greater productivity, balance and wholeness.”

The beneficial outcome of such enrichment should result in riches and wealth, both personally and materially.

Why Should We Worry About Enriching Children's Lives?

Children are the future leaders of the world, if it is to survive. Exploring more effective ways to enhance human growth and development in novel ways is imperative, if we are to prompt them to learn, grow, develop, reflect, apply, and act. Parker Palmer (1999) advocates that it is the purpose of education to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world. David Perkins (2004) indicates that the purpose of education is not just about acquiring knowledge, but about learning how to do significant things with what you know. Howard Gardner would agree as he indicates that a good measure of intelligence is a student's ability to fashion products. The constructivist theorists would argue that students must be permitted the freedom to think, to question, to reflect, and to interact with ideas, objects, and others—to construct meaning (Brooks and Brooks 1999).

Moreover, we know that the current traditional modes of education are not working for many – and that the traditional modes of assessment fall short of the mark. Also, there is an increasing number of students who are classified as having some type of learning disability, such as attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder among other labels. It is difficult to keep the new breed of students focused on subject or task in the traditional teaching modes. Therefore, the existing paradigm presents a challenge and anomaly. The time is ripe for a scientific and educational transformation that leads to a new framework to meet the needs of the new breed of students, shaped by the circumstances, events, values and norms of the current society, nationally and globally.

Historically, the Academy has come a long way in our understanding about what is necessary to provide for the nurturance of children. This is true when you review the history of child development and notions about the purposes of children—from abuse as infants to using them in child labor in factories to allowing them to hang on the streets before the creation of kindergarten, to calling them “little savages.” Understanding of the importance and need for children's nurturance and development, including the education of parents and teaching professionals have been important steps in making progress toward creating enriching experiences for children.

The call to enrich the lives of children is the call to give the children of the world every opportunity to evolve into psychologically healthy, whole, viable, and productive human beings who will contribute to the good of self, society and world; and which will hopefully lead to a richer and

better world in which to thrive and grow. Developing pedagogy and strategies that permit more collaboration, a drawing out of the unique talents, interests, and creative aspects of individual children is imperative.