

CHAPTER 1



Toward Life-Enriching Education

Introduction

I'd like to offer you a vision for the future of education in this country. In this book I will be describing a process of education that can serve, not arbitrary order and authority, but life itself. In this larger dream, we will live in a world in which obedience to authority is no longer a major objective. Before we begin we need to know what our dream is—our ultimate goal. Here is mine—and, I suggest, every human being's dream and goal, at heart: a world nurtured and sustained by Life-Enriching organizations.

I would like to educate this and future generations of children to be able to create new organizations whose goal is to meet human needs—to make life more wonderful for themselves and each other. I call the process of education that can achieve this, *Life-Enriching Education*. I call its opposite *Domination Education*.

Life-Enriching Organizations

Life-Enriching organizations are characterized by fairness and equity in how resources and privileges are distributed. People in positions of leadership *serve* their constituencies rather than desiring

to control them. The nature of laws, rules, and regulations are consensually defined, understood, and willingly followed.

Life-Enriching organizations, whether families, schools, businesses, or governments, value the well-being of each person in the community or organization and support Life-Enriching connections between the members of the group.

Life-Enriching human connections have three characteristics:

- 1) The people are empathically connected to what each is feeling and needing—they do not blame themselves or let judgments implying wrongness obscure this connection to each other.
- 2) The people are aware of the interdependent nature of their relationships and value the others’ needs being fulfilled equally to their own needs being fulfilled—they know that their needs cannot be met at someone else’s expense.
- 3) The people take care of themselves and each other with the sole intention of enriching their lives—they are not motivated by, nor do they use coercion in the form of guilt, shame, duty, obligation, fear of punishment, or hope for extrinsic rewards.

Comparing the Dream to the Nightmare

Perhaps the best way to describe my dream of Life-Enriching organizations is to contrast it with the nightmare of Domination organizations.

DOMINATION ORGANIZATIONS	LIFE-ENRICHING ORGANIZATIONS
Goal: Prove who's right, who's wrong Get what you want Obey authority	Goal: Make life more wonderful Get everyone's needs met Connect with self and others

Motivation:

Punishment, reward, guilt, shame, obligation, duty

Motivation:

Contributing to the wellbeing of others
Receiving freely from others

Evaluation:

Labels, judgments

Evaluation:

What is fulfilling human needs and what isn't?

What would make life more wonderful for you and me?

In a Life-Enriching organization, we get what we want but never at someone else's expense—getting what we want at someone else's expense cannot fulfill all our needs. Our goal in a Life-Enriching organization is far more beautiful—to express our needs without blaming others and to listen respectfully to others' needs, without anyone giving up or giving in—and thus create a quality of connection through which everyone's needs can be met.

Life-Enriching Education

The students coming out of an educational program that I envision would learn to value their autonomy and interdependence, and would have learned the organizational skills necessary to create Life-Enriching systems in which to live their lives.

What you would observe in such schools:

- teachers and students working together as partners, setting objectives mutually and consensually.
- teachers and students speaking a process language. The one I teach is called *Nonviolent Communication*, which focuses attention on: 1) the feelings and needs motivating each person and 2) what actions might best meet their needs—at no one else's expense.
- students motivated by their eagerness to learn and not by fear of punishment or promise of reward.

- tests given at the beginning of the course of study to determine need, not at the end to determine reward or punishment. Grades replaced with evaluations of student learning that describe what they had learned—what skills and knowledge they had mastered.
- an interdependent learning community designed to encourage students to care about one another and help one another learn, rather than competing for a limited number of rewards—a community where the common goal is to support all students in reaching their objectives.
- all rules and regulations being created consensually by the people who are affected by the rules—students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Force only being used to protect needs such as health and safety, but never with the intent to punish.

Changing the System

So what I am advocating is not just a new curriculum, a different daily schedule, an adjustment in classroom arrangement, or some innovative teaching techniques. Many individuals among you have tried the ideas I will suggest in this book, and collectively we have tried all of them. What I am urging is a shift in values, a change in the entire underlying system, something as radical as that.

The people I meet are hungry for such a change, ravenous for it. They realize, along with Morrie Schwartz in Mitch Albom's best-selling *Tuesdays With Morrie*, that "the culture we have does not make people feel good about themselves. We're teaching the wrong things. And you have to be strong enough to say, if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it. Create your own. Most people can't do it."

Maybe alone we can't do it, but the first step in creating a Life-Enriching culture is to be willing to imagine it, and then maybe together, we can.