

YOUNG SOLDIERS AND WARRIORS RAISING EMOTIONALLY COMMITTED BLACK LEADERS

We believe that our people have a great need for a leadership that has identity, purpose and direction. Our people need leaders who can actively organize our people to gain, maintain and use power. In an article of the Council of Independent Black Institutions newsletter, Kalamu Salaam has stated:

Face it, we cannot and we will not have true Black leaders until we educate our youth to accept the responsibility of being Black leaders. And to do that we must raise our children to be emotionally committed to Black people first.

How do we begin to “raise our children to be emotionally committed to Black people first”? One valuable method is developing discipline in each child. Discipline is self-control. Without self-control our children cannot develop positively because they will be orderless and aimless. Without discipline our children will be slaves to simply acting/moving. With discipline our children will be free enough to analyze, make decisions and act on those decisions.

To develop self-control we are developing a system of behavior we call protocol, the correct and conscious way of doing. Protocol is the broad backdrop of our school program which sets the approach we, teachers and students, use in saying and doing everything. We say our protocol is correct for us because it aids us in developing along a purposeful path in keeping with our ideology. We say that our protocol is conscious because we are aware of what we are doing. We struggle to consciously learn to do what we must do.

Why do we teach protocol to our children? We believe that we have been programmed to act in an unconscious manner, devoid of identity, purpose and direction. We are aware and appreciative of the need for the example of Africans striving to act in a conscious and correct manner. We believe that we should always struggle in a positive manner. Finally, we believe that following a protocol is the most efficient and effective method of attaining a desired goal or fulfilling a particular purpose.

Protocol may be a specific series of steps to get something done. For example, the way we wash our hands or the way the children leave the table after eating. Or it is the manner in which we speak to each other while correcting behavior. Protocol can also be an action that the whole group does for the benefit of one. For example, before moving to another group activity, every child is ready. Protocol can also be an action one does for the benefit of the group. For example, we ask and encourage each child to set the correct example and thereby be a leader when in line, or in class, or during outside play. Once one child receives recognition for being a leader, another child will follow that example and do it, too. Before you know it, the whole group is standing in line correctly. The actions of the first child giving good example helps the group as a whole follow the protocol.

Of course, when our children first enroll in our school they are not always disciplined youth ready to learn. Some of our students come to us crying to go home. Some come fighting, physically revolting against the school. Some children come wide-eyed in a mild “shock” afraid to do anything because they sense the seriousness of our school.

The needs and personalities of our children are widely varied and each child is a new challenge in the process of raising our children to be Black in color, culture and consciousness. How do we begin to shape a group of children into Black youth with positive values and discipline (self-control) able to learn, understand and accept their role as future leaders of our people?

BUILDING TRUST

The first way we develop discipline is by building trust. Securing our children's trust is important in our teaching process and we build it in five ways:

1. touching our children,
2. respecting our children,
3. praising our children,
4. struggling with our children and
5. demanding truth and telling the truth.

Touching our young children communicates stronger than any words. Our children are very physical, i.e., they experience and learn best through their bodies (senses). You can firmly touch a child on the head with the palm of your hand to communicate love and concern. You can grab a child's arm and move the child to a certain place and, thereby, communicate correction of behavior. You can pull them close to you and hold them. This one action can fill an empty space inside the child that needs to be filled.

We are aware that when we touch our children it should be done out of love and respect and not out of anger. When we allow our children's behavior to upset us and we lose control and patience, we try to be especially aware of keeping our hands to ourselves and away from our children. When we praise our children or are pleased by their strong actions, we try to be especially aware of touching them in a definite manner with a hug, a squeeze or some other way. According to our children's needs, personalities and the situation, touching is used to build their trust in our staff and in our whole school by communicating care, security and respect.

We also understand that our school's environment should be prepared to secure our children's trust. Children should be able to touch the "new" school and the "new" school should touch our children. In the beginning, our children have a need to touch everything, to find out about everything. When school first starts in the fall, new students will reach out for something and stop, look at the teacher as if they were doing something wrong. Or a child might say, "Oh, look at him, he's foolin' with that". But we not only allow our children to touch, we in fact encourage them to do so. We have consciously prepared the shelves so that all materials are for our children's use. In this way our children are able to both overcome the fear of a new environment and feel secure enough to open up.

A school environment that is well planned will help our children feel secure because there is purpose, order and cleanliness about the rooms. Colors are used for warmth. Plants and pictures are used for inspiration. The furniture is simple, sturdy and functional. This beautiful positive atmosphere is maintained throughout the year by keeping order, by cleaning the building everyday and by creating a sense of permanence.

Touching our children and encouraging our children to touch helps to build trust.

Respecting our children is given in three ways:

- a. paying attention to their presence
- b. acknowledging their worth
- c. appreciating what they have to offer

Paying attention to our children's presence. Ask our children how do they feel daily or say "good morning" to them. When a child falls accidentally, ask if they are alright and show concern. When bringing our children home for the day or when they leave school for the day, share a little special thought about the next day. "See you tomorrow, Cyrena. Remember, you're the leader tomorrow."

Or if a child has missed a day or two of school, acknowledge their presence, "We missed you yesterday, Brother Kadri. We're so glad to have you back."

Never unconsciously ignore a child. Give an answer to our children in a clear patient manner. If you are busy at the time a question is asked, say that you are busy and let the child know you are listening by saying a few words, "One minute, Brother Shujaa, I'll be right with you" or "I can't help you now; I must finish this."

Acknowledging our children's worth. Having faith in our children's capability (will and ability) to accomplish every task is a first step of recognizing our children's worth. We understand that all children, for various reasons, have limits to what they are able to understand and do. Out of a true and deeply rooted love for our children, we say, "you can do it and you will do; all you need is some help!" or "No, Sister Kiini, let Brother Kamau do it himself. We must learn to do for ourselves." We show our willingness to take time with our children by helping them and talking with them.

Appreciating what our children have to offer. Children offer a lot all the time. Many times we adults stress and look for negative behavior by constantly correcting those who are doing "wrong". The most important offering our children give is positive behavior. Praise our children whenever they help each other. Say "thank you" whenever they help by getting something or opening a door.

But above all, listen and respond to the conversation and suggestions of our children. Explain to them why and what they have said is strong or silly, correct or incorrect. Thank our children for good behavior.

Pay attention to our children. Appreciate what they have to offer. Acknowledge their worth. Respect builds trust!

Praise the positive. "Look at Brother Kenyatta, he's helping without being asked to help. He saw he was needed so he is helping." When a child is following a direction, praise should be given, "Isn't this beautiful! Look at Sister Twinette! She's cleaning up and we only said it once!" Or, "Brother Jamahl, you are a leader because you are giving good example. You are standing in line with your fists at your side and your feet together! You are a star, brother!" Always look for the positive. Always stress the positive and the positive will increase because each child will want to be rewarded with praise for their strong behavior.

We believe give praise where praise is due. We try not to use praise like candy or some other form of bribe. We do not give praise before the job is completed although we do encourage our children as they work. Praise is reserved for a job well done.

“Struggle is what it’s all about! It’s something we just can’t do without.” This is what Brother Bear teaches Brother Rabbit in WHO WILL SPEAK FOR US (Ahidiana 1974). By taking time and painstakingly getting our children to line up, march, eat correctly, toilet correctly and so on, our children will know that we care for them. In the end, our children are proud because they can take care of themselves and they appreciate being taught to be self-reliant. Faith in each child’s worth will aid teachers in struggling to meet the needs of each child.

Some children need patient, quiet prompting. Some children need strong, firm commands. Never give up on our children because children have a finely tuned sense which lets them know when they are being rejected. After positively and resolutely struggling with our children, they will accomplish.

Helping our children look back on their accomplishments, “You know what I’m feeling really good inside because you have tried to stand in line like soldiers and warriors, you spoke in loud strong voices when we were in class and look how well you’re eating your lunch! I’m really proud of you!”

We let our children know that we expect many strong actions from them and we are disappointed when they are weak and pleased when they struggle to be strong. Persistently struggling with a child or a group of children teaches struggle by example. If our love for our children is strongly expressed and genuinely felt, our children will return our love by doing what they have been taught.

Struggle with our children based on the faith we have in them. As our children witness this faith shown through our struggle with them, our children will trust us.

Truth is the core of building trust. If you are a “fairytale” then everything you say and do will be make-believe to our children. Teachers too must struggle to be examples.

Always tell the truth: “I don’t know the answer to that question right now, but I’m going to struggle to find out.”

Demand truth from our children. Truth is what is. Truth is reality. It is not a moral judgment. For example, it is true that we are oppressed, but that doesn’t mean oppression is good.

Standing up for the truth is important in our children’s moral development. How can our children struggle with their individual and our collective weaknesses if they have a problem standing up for what is true? Do not accept excuses or evasions for answers to direct questions.

Mama: Did you hit Malaika, Asante?

Asante: She won’t let me...

Mama: No, sister. I didn’t ask you what happen. Did you hit Malaika?

Asante: Yes, Mama. She won’t let me sit down.

Mama: Thank you for standing up for the truth, but if you need to sit you should first talk to Malaika about it.

Value truth more than tattling or being an informant. When a child anxiously reports some negative behavior of another child, ask if they talk to the child about their behavior first. When trying to find out who did some negative act, never allow another child to inform the group that a certain child did it. Encourage the children to stand up for the truth by making it safe to do so. Once our children know that they will be praised, hugged, given “dap” or some positive response given for the truth, they will gladly offer the truth.

Make promises and keep them. If we do not keep a promise, acknowledge it and say that we are wrong. It is important for our children to understand why we do and don’t do certain actions. In this way they learn to make decisions on their own and willingly stand up for what is true. We don’t need robots busy trying to please adults; we need aware leaders.

ROUTINES

The second way we shape our youth into disciplined soldiers learning to understand their role as future leaders of African people in America is by establishing routines. Routines set limits and give order to the school day. We follow the same specific routing throughout every school day. Once our children learn the routine, along with being comfortable in the school environment and with their teachers, they are more secure because they know what is going to happen and when.

Creativity blossoms in each child because the environment is controlled, the work periods have time limits and each activity has its own set of rules. Children need limits, for without limits, they will ramble from one thing to another or show little interest in anything and not be able to complete tasks. With limits our children have standards. We believe standards are necessary to the process of being creative, i.e., improving and beautifying.

STRUGGLING TO BE CORRECT

Even after our first two steps of building trust and establishing routines have been tried, there are times when our children need to be encouraged to follow the protocol. At this stage we introduce them to what we call struggling to be correct. It is a three-step process practiced by our staff and children follow the protocol. The three step process is:

1. Discipline - getting the child(ren) to decide to do the task by appealing to the child(ren)’s values.
2. Force - getting the child(ren) to do the task by standing over them, making them do the task or asking the child(ren) to choose between doing the task or being denied a privilege or desire.
3. Punishment - inflicted pain or discomfort by isolation or denial of a desire or by a physical slap on the hand, buttocks or legs.

In correcting a problem, we criticize the behavior and not the child. We should always criticize behavior rather than the child who displays the behavior. Try as much as possible to speak in terms of the behavior rather than feelings and/or attitudes. In other words “what you did was not correct” rather than “you are a bad child.” Our major concern should be the cause of the behavior and not the symptom.

We punish only in extreme situations. The most important aim of this whole process is to get our children to accomplish the task. When a child is punished, the task is not accomplished. So, why do we punish?

We punish to prevent negative and/or disruptive behavior. Behavior which holds back the progress of the group is an extreme offense. This must be understood by each child.

Another aspect of punishment which teachers should be aware of is that a child may do a certain action just to “test” you to see what you are going to do. Be aware of this and make a decision again based on what was done, and the needs and personality of the child.

Whenever we punish it is swift and decisive. Our isolation is complete, our slaps are firm. We struggle not to act out of anger, but out of concern. We are not liberal with small or minor infractions. We attempt to correct every incorrect behavior through discipline or finally force. If that fails and the incorrect behavior is detrimental to others (either disruptive or establishing negative precedents) we move quickly to punish. The deterrent force of punishment is measured not simply by its severity, but also by its certainty. This means if punishment is to be used, it must be used immediately or as soon as possible after the negative behavior, and it must be sure, i.e., do not punish a child for a deed that you did not witness. Punishment can easily become injustice and this we must guard against. Again, we must emphasize, punishment does not teach and is, therefore, an indication that the teaching process has failed. After punishing a child, we must still teach that child, otherwise, we only encourage ignorance and a false belief in “might is right”. We teach our students to constantly struggle and look at every experience as a lesson.

We are firm with our children. Everyone is required to lead. Everyone is required to follow. Everyone is given a job which is important to the functioning of the school. Each child is valued and taught to be accountable and responsible for self, brothers and sisters and the total environment of the school.

We know that our educational program is rigorous, but it takes pressure and persistence to produce diamonds. We are an African people struggling in America under conditions of oppression, exploitation and subjugation. We are not trying to raise “cute” simply Black and beautiful children or “smart” (high IQs) children who will feed into and become part of the American system. We are trying to raise soldiers and warriors, future leaders in our people’s struggle for power and national liberation. Power to our people must start with positive education for our children. We are proud to be able to make this contribution to our people’s struggle.

Prepare our children to take the lead. Give our children and education that will be useful in our struggle. Raise revolutionaries, leaders and workers. Tomorrow will belong to us, only if we educate our children today. Power to our people, education to our children!