

Spring has finally arrived, reminding us that even in difficult times there are brighter days around the corner. There are two themes in this newsletter: the first is about understanding and maximizing the development of the minds of our children and adolescents, and the second is about improving the well being of our global neighbors, both in our country and in theirs. We've also included quick updates on our projects. Thank you for all you do to strengthen children, youth, families and communities.

—Nancy Ashley and Lisa Kagan, Heliotrope

Nurturing the Developing Minds of our Babies and Adolescents

Compassionate Children: The Key to World Peace and Saving the Planet?

By Nancy Ashley

The book that has meant the most to me this year is *Our Tragic Flaw* (self-published and available through Amazon, \$24.95). I doubt if I can do it justice in this review, but feel compelled to try. In a mere 350 pages, the book draws powerful connections among the need for every single baby to have secure attachments, the importance of compassion in all aspects of our lives (as the Dalai Lama tried to teach us last year), and the steps needed to turn around the frightening global trajectories of war and consumption that threaten to destroy us and our natural environment.

Secure attachment assures a child the world is safe

Tacoma author Parke Burgess believes the chain begins with the two basic pathways through which babies base their expectations of the world. He explains that “when a fearful infant receives the loving attention of her caregiver, she experiences a comforting return to a sense connectedness to the larger world. When the infant is denied the sense of connection she seeks, she feels invisible and unrecognized, and she experiences anxiety that her needs will not get met.” If this latter pattern is reinforced over time, the baby will develop anxiety and a sense that the world is neither safe nor secure. Burgess believes this is the start of a sense of scarcity, which leads us to “accumulate an abundance of resources out

of proportion to our need – but exactly in proportion to our misperception of need and our fear of want.”

He follows this line of reasoning to conclude that as we mature, driven by a feeling of scarcity that few of us outgrow, we obtain more than we need, and fail to consider deeply anything or anyone beyond ourselves. Acting out of that mindframe, we damage others and the relationships we have with them. This is our tragic flaw.

Changing the world requires rewiring our brains

Burgess believes that we cannot build the political will to address the immense challenges of sustaining our world

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heliotrope 1. A flower that turns to face the sun. 2. An instrument for making long-term observations. 3. A purple that is bluer and stronger than cobalt violet.

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without changing minds at a much deeper level than using conventional political solutions and social change methods. He proposes that most of us don't want to accept the enormity of our individual and collective perils, because they have very threatening implications.

At first Burgess seems an unlikely messenger for such a profound book. He is not a Nobel Laureate, a research scientist nor a revered political science academic. Rather, he

Burgess defines violence as the imposition of will, described as our willingness to exert our will on others to satisfy our needs, even if it violates theirs.

has a doctorate in orchestral conducting and has been a fundraiser for environmental preservation. However, after the violence of 9/11, he followed a calling to promote a deeper understanding of violence and non-violence in the world and joined a Zen monastery.

During his time in the monastery, Burgess had a revelation that forms the basis of *Our Tragic Flaw*, coming to believe that violence and nonviolence exist very deeply within each one of us all the time. He posits that we generally think about violence in very narrow ways, confining our view to murderers and child molesters for example, while nonviolence comes into play mainly in fighting oppression or protesting wars. These narrow views keep us from seeing the ways in which violence and nonviolence exist in the average mind and the normal routines of our daily lives.

Violence as the imposition of will

Burgess defines violence as the imposition of will, described as our willingness to exert our will on others to satisfy our needs, even if it violates theirs. Thus, acts of greed, historical revisionism, and even serious neglect of someone dependent on us fit within this expanded definition. He further argues that the "logic" of violence, established in our minds out of anxiety about scarcity, goes on to permeate social, political, and economic experiences in ways we probably do not consciously recognize as violence -- bringing us to the brink of destruction of our environment.

To turn this trajectory around, Burgess lays out a pathway that would allow us to transcend our current logic of violence. He describes a theory of child development that explains the origins of this destructive direction in the structure of human thought, and uses the principles of emerging neuroscience and attachment theory to explain how caregivers shape the architecture of babies' brains in ways that profoundly influence their experience of the world

throughout life. He demonstrates that children with secure attachments have the opportunity to develop emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that can benefit their loved ones as well as the cities, nations, and global societies in which they live.

Empathy and insightful parenting are keys to a nonviolent society

From this foundation, Burgess challenges us to recognize and reverse our own violent behaviors because we not only owe it to our children and the planet, but also because it offers us the possibility of a more fulfilling and joyful life. He urges us to address the violent patterns of our minds, to develop the "cognitive competence" needed to create a nonviolent society. In particular, he believes we must develop greater powers of empathy and a stronger understanding of the interconnectedness of our global society.

From our own emotional health, he believes we'll be in a position to develop these capacities in our children through insightful parenting. With a critical mass of adults and children whose brains are wired for nonviolence, he believes change on a greater level is possible.

Teenagers, Neurons, and the U.S. Supreme Court: A few things everyone should know about adolescent brain development

By Bayta L. Maring, Ph.D.

Should developing adolescents be held accountable for their actions in the same way as adults? What about cases of juveniles who commit heinous, almost indescribably horrific acts of violence? Should the death penalty be considered as a possible sentence? In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court weighed these questions as they debated whether or not to forbid the death penalty for individuals who were under the age of 18 when they committed their crimes.¹ As part of the decision, the nine justices considered not only changing standards of society, but also a growing body of research from the field of neuroscience indicating that adolescents' brains are substantially different than those of adults.

The changing face of adolescent brain research

For decades, neuroscientists have explored the processes by which the brain matures, one of which they refer to as synaptic over-generation and pruning. The billions of cells in our brains (neurons) are connected via a dense network of insulated fibers. During brain development, the number and density of these connections increase dramatically (over-generation); over time, certain connections strengthen while other fade away (pruning). Research indicates that brain activity determines

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which connections survive; hence, many researchers summarize this developmental process as “use it or lose it.”

Brain imaging suggests that synaptic over-generation and pruning is most pronounced during the first three years of life. Research from the past decade indicates, however, that there is a second wave of synaptic over-generation and pruning that begins before puberty and continues into the teenage years.² However, this change is only seen in the pre-frontal cortex, an area of the brain believed to be related to higher brain functions such as judgment, decision-making, and risk assessment.

The possible implications of the research are far-reaching and fascinating. First, the period of adolescence may be critical in determining which complex patterns of thinking, reasoning, and judgment will persist into adulthood. Second, these changes in the brain suggest that adolescents might not have the same decision-making capacity as adults. In an interview for the PBS program *Frontline* in 1999,³ Jay Giedd, a researcher at the National Institute for Mental Health suggested, “It’s sort of unfair to expect [teens] to have adult levels of organizational skills or decision-making before their brains are finished being built.”

No more executions of perpetrators under age 18 at the time of a crime

This second implication was one issue the Supreme Court wrestled with in its 2005 decision. At question was whether there was enough scientific evidence to suggest that adolescents could not make adult-like decisions, and could therefore not be held accountable in the same way for the most gruesome of criminal acts. The final decision was 5- 4 in favor of forbidding execution for perpetrators who were under the age of 18 when committing their crime; however, the brain imaging testimony was not generally considered

critical in the decision. In her dissenting opinion, Justice O’Connor indicated that it was unclear whether the differences between adolescent and adult brains were significant enough to suggest differences in culpability. In fact, a number of scientists declined to testify in the case, including Giedd, who said that the data “just aren’t there” to link differences between adult and adolescent brains and actual reasoning or decision-making ability.

There’s always more to learn about the mysteries of teen brain development

For the Supreme Court and for anyone working with youth, it is wise to be cautious in interpreting research about adolescent brain development. While mounting evidence suggests that teens’ brains are different than adults’, science has yet to uncover exactly how these changes in the brain relate to behavior. However, when trying to comprehend the unique, fluctuating, and sometimes baffling everyday behavior of teenagers, it might be useful to keep in mind that those teen brains are still in flux and, perhaps, at a critical moment in development.

For more details about adolescent brain development, review an article from the National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/teenage-brain-a-work-in-progress.shtml>

Bayta Maring is a program evaluator and lecturer in psychology at the University of Washington. She was integral to the School’s Out Washington supply-and-demand study of after school and youth development programs.

NOTES:

- 1 Roper v. Simmons (03-633), 543 U.S. 551 (2005).
- 2 Giedd, J. N., Blumental, J., et al. (1999). Brain development during childhood and adolescence: A longitudinal MRI study. *Nature Neuroscience*, 2, 10, 861-863.
- 3 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/interviews/giedd.html>

Improving the Well-Being of our Global Neighbors

Healthy women, healthy families: Pioneering a culturally competent mental health approach for refugee and immigrant women

By Lisa Kagan

Many refugee and immigrant women have experienced multiple traumatic events in their lives, starting in their home countries, some continuing in resettlement camps, and sometimes again as new residents in the United States. The women experience trauma-related physical symptoms

including anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, digestive problems, muscle aches and heart palpitation. Quite often they seek help in emergency rooms in local hospitals only to be directed to see mental health professionals for help with post-traumatic stress. Many of the women, however, never follow up on the referral because the Western approach to mental health does not incorporate their needs or culture. Unfortunately, the symptoms reoccur and the women return to their primary doctor or to the emergency room.

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Merging traditional healing and modern mental health approaches works

Practitioners and advocates from local non-profits in the Seattle area, including the Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA) and Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS), have been working to develop culturally competent ways to engage refugee and immigrant women suffering from post-traumatic stress and a host of other symptoms associated with acculturation. Bilingual practitioners experienced in working with refugee and immigrant women seek to address the painful physical and mental symptoms these women face without undermining their traditional cultural practices.

One innovation that merges traditional healing and Western mental health treatment is providing resettlement counseling

One innovation that merges traditional healing and Western mental health treatment is providing resettlement counseling with therapeutic counseling.

with therapeutic counseling. In this arrangement, refugee and immigrant women can take advantage of the opportunity to discuss their health, family, housing, and work needs while having access to a mental health practitioner who can discuss holistically how all of these concerns affect her health. This strategy is used informally in community organizations, such as ReWA and ACRS, which provide resources and have mental health practitioners on staff.

In 2008 ReWA mental health professionals served 200 clients using various mental health approaches and offering information, referral, and access to services in 30 languages. That same year, ACRS mental health professionals helped 1,406 adults and 303 youth and their families with the various mental health services they offer.

Funders can help provide culturally competent mental health services

The goal of these services is to help families cope with a range of behavioral health issues and stabilize their lives. They integrate familiar treatment models and cultural activities, so clients can practice their cultural traditions and build their self-esteem.

The challenge for community organizations providing this kind of service is how to tap into mental health funding to provide a culturally responsive delivery system that helps refugee and immigrant women, their families, and their communities. When advocates and funders think about supporting refugee and immigrant women, they can think beyond the recent

Western models of mental health, and support traditional, community level efforts that are just as powerful and perhaps more effective.

For more information please visit the Refugee Women's Alliance website at www.rewa.org and the Asian Counseling and Referral Service website at www.acrs.org

Promoting Peace through Education in Pakistan and Afghanistan

By Nancy Ashley

Greg Mortenson, a former mountain climber, has devoted his life since 1993 to establishing schools in remote and often volatile regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. He has established over 78 schools, providing education to over 28,000 children, including 18,000 girls. His remarkable, courageous and inspiring story is captured in *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace, One School At A Time* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006, \$15.00), which has been on the New York Times Best Seller list since it was published.

The title of the book explains what he learned quickly while working in a very different culture. The chief of the village in which Greg built his first school told him, "Here [in Pakistan

"Here [in Pakistan and Afghanistan] we drink three cups of tea to do business; the first you are a stranger, the second you become a friend, and the third, you join our family."

and Afghanistan] we drink three cups of tea to do business; the first you are a stranger, the second you become a friend, and the third, you join our family." Mortenson, often by trial and error, learned to form relationships with and cooperate with the various governmental, political, and religious groups in this complex region.

Education as an alternative to war for reducing Islamic extremism

In 2008, he was asked to advise the U.S. military on how to fight Islamic extremism. Many senior officers sought his advice on how to build stronger relationships with village elders and tribal leaders. A Wall Street Journal article in December 2008 noted that several of the officers came to share Mortenson's belief that providing young Muslims with an education is the most effective way of curbing the growth of Islamic extremism.

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PROMOTING PEACE *continued from page 2...*

Mortenson co-founded the Central Asia Institute (CAI), a non-profit organized to support his ongoing work, and Pennies for Peace, which shows children how they can make a positive impact on a global scale, one penny at a time. The program has been offered in hundreds of schools in all fifty states. The Pennies for Peace toolkit assists teachers to implement the program, supported by a curriculum designed to increase cross-cultural understanding and critical thinking. The curriculum is grouped by grade clusters and is tied to national social studies, literacy, and mathematics standards. See www.penniesforpeace.org.

Indeed pennies can make a difference. The CAI web site notes that the cost of educating a child in the developing world

is about \$1 per month per child. The site also states that several global studies show that educating a girl to at least a fifth grade education level is the most significant factor in impoverished societies to decrease infant mortality rates, decrease or stabilize population growth, and significantly improve the basic quality of health and life over a generation. Donations can be made to CAI at <https://www.ikat.org/make-a-donation/>

Mortenson was nominated in January 2009 for the Nobel Peace Prize by a bipartisan group of six members of the U.S. Congress.

“ Implied in . . . scholarly research . . . is the intriguing suggestion that human systems are largely heliotropic in character, meaning that they exhibit an observable and largely automatic tendency to evolve in the direction of positive anticipatory images of the future. What I will argue is that just as plants of many varieties exhibit a tendency to grow in the direction of sunlight, there is an analogous process going on in all human systems.” ”

David Cooperrider, *Professor of Organizational Behavior, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University*

UPDATE: What Heliotrope is Working On

We continue to be privileged to work with many inspiring and committed people dedicated to improving the well being of our communities. Here is a sampling of our recent and current projects.

The Building Resilience Fund

Major philanthropic partners decided to help families struggling because of the current recession and invest collectively in the Building Resilience Fund. These partners include The Seattle Foundation (convener), The Boeing Company, Microsoft Corporation, Medina Foundation, Lawrence True and Linda Brown Foundation, Starbucks Coffee Company, United Way of King County, and Safeco Foundation. The purpose of the fund is to provide families with a broad range of services in one place, break down barriers to accessing resources, and provide pathways to economic resiliency and long-term security. Heliotrope collaborated with the funders group to create the investment plan to achieve these goals and to allocate investment dollars.

Hunger Relief Now! Plan for King County

Heliotrope developed a plan on behalf of United Way

of King County by drawing on several recent plans with similar goals prepared in Washington State and around the country. We created a plan with twelve short-term and long-term strategies based on maximizing federally-funded food programs and strengthening community-based food programs, coupled with strong coordination and policy reform. The plan is available at <http://www.uwkc.org/newsevents/researchreports/default.asp>.

Strategic Planning with the YMCA of Silicon Valley

Nancy is currently assisting the YMCA of Silicon Valley as it develops its first strategic plan after the merger last year of two strong YMCAs. The Board and CEO are committed to framing their plan based on the outcomes they want to achieve.

Supply of and Demand for After school and Youth Development Programs in Washington

School's Out Washington engaged Heliotrope to conduct a comprehensive study of the overall supply of after school and youth development programs in Washington and to

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systematically gauge demand. Because many programs are not licensed and are sponsored by many sectors, no one maintains a comprehensive directory of them. We worked with School's Out in a multi-layered approach to collect information, including conducting a statewide survey of over 1,500 providers, analysis of statewide and national data sets, and synthesizing input from focus groups of parents and children living in various regions in Washington. We found that although there are a substantial number of "slots" open in after school and youth development programs, they often do not match the locations, content, quality, hours, transportation, and affordability needed by families in the area. The report is available at http://schoolsoutwashington.org/documents/FullBook_FinalPDF_SinglePages_forWeb.pdf.

Innovative Early Learning Approaches Start at Home

Washington State policies to improve early learning focus primarily on children who attend licensed childcare programs, preschools, or other formal group settings. This focus excludes the 63 percent of Washington children ages birth to five who do not participate in these formal programs because they are cared for by parents, relatives, friends, and neighbors. Three of Heliotrope's projects aim to develop strategies and allocate resources that respect the diversity of parents' choices for childcare arrangements and increase outreach to the children least likely to be ready for school.

Thrive by Five Washington and Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregiver Support

Thrive by Five Washington is an early learning public-private partnership created in 2006 and led by education, government and business leaders. In 2008, Thrive by Five asked its two demonstration communities (East Yakima and White Center/Boulevard Park) to create a long-term vision and initial implementation steps to provide resources and supports to family, friend and neighbor caregivers in their communities. Each community formed a local planning group for this purpose. Heliotrope facilitated meetings with both groups to help them develop strategies and desired outcomes so that grandparents and other relatives, friends and neighbors can strengthen the quality of early learning experiences for the children in their care.

Building a Statewide System of Support for Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers

Many young children, especially infants, toddlers, the children of immigrant families, and families living below the poverty line rely heavily on grandparents, other relatives, friends and neighbors to care for their children

while parents work. Thanks to ongoing leadership by funders, community champions, Child Care Resources, and the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network, a system to provide resources and support to FFN caregivers is being constructed throughout the state. Heliotrope has been deeply involved in strategic planning, fund development, policy changes, and evaluation for the FFN Initiative for over six years.

Business Partnership for Early Learning Wants To Close the School Preparedness Gap

This business-led group is in the fourth year of its five-year demonstration project to determine if an evidence-based, home visiting program for parents and toddlers could help children who are at high risk of coming to kindergarten more than two years behind their peers. Evaluation results for the Parent-Child Home Program continue to exceed expectations. Retention rates remain high and families continue to express high levels of satisfaction. Heliotrope has served as the project coordinator since fall of 2004. More information is available at www.BusinessForEarlyLearning.org.

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