

# MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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## *Tomorrow's Children* *Partnership Education in Action*

### Transcript

#### INTRODUCTION

**RIANE EISLER:** If we look at our rapidly changing world, we see that today and tomorrow's children face unprecedented challenges: Personal and ethical challenges, environmental and economic challenges, social and technological challenges. I wrote *Tomorrow's Children*, a blueprint for partnership education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because of my passionate commitment to help develop the kind of education that will enable young people to meet these challenges. If you look at the picture that we get about schools from popular culture, from television, where young people, students, are moved on a conveyor belt from class to class, from grade to grade, it's really like a factory, a place where education is something that is done to students rather than with students. We all know that for real learning, young people need to be actively engaged. Many dedicated educators have worked to move us to a more forward-looking education. But their work is still primarily found as add-ons. And add-ons, well they tend to fall off. Add-ons can also be pushed out. So what we urgently need today is a new integrative framework for education. Partnership education provides this framework. It adds innovative new elements, but it goes much further.

#### CHAPTER ONE: PARTNERSHIP AND DOMINATOR MODELS

**RIANE EISLER:** Education doesn't happen in a vacuum, it happens in a social and historical context. Just a few hundred years ago, if a child got an education at all, it was for her or his fixed station in life. The emphasis was on rankings, on learning to obey orders, and if that was one's station in life, to give them. Canings and other brutal treatment of children were considered normal. The curriculum focused almost exclusively on one half of humanity because it was a much more male dominated time, with hardly any attention paid to the female half. All this was appropriate for an authoritarian, top-down, rigidly male-dominated society. A society orienting more to a dominator rather than partnership model. This distinction between the partnership and dominator models comes out of my research over three decades, multi-disciplinary research looking at a large span

of our cultural evolution that is reported in part, in my book, *The Chalice and the Blade*. This research addresses fundamental questions that many of us have asked. Questions that in my life came out of my experiences as a little girl in Nazi Austria. Questions such as, do we have to hunt and persecute each other? When we humans have such an enormous capacity for caring, for creativity, what is it that has tilted us back? Don't we have any alternatives to this way that is so often presented to us as just the way things are? Out of this research, the answer came: yes we do have alternatives. But we cannot see these alternatives unless we look at human history through a wider lens. What we begin to see is that societies, whether they're ancient or modern, eastern or western, that orient more to the dominator model—we see that the primary principle for organizing relations is ranking. Man over woman, man over man, race over race, nation over nation, man over nature. But as you move more towards the partnership model, you begin to see a different governing principle: linking. There are still hierarchies; there are still very clear lines of responsibility and leadership. But leadership is not based on the power to dominate, to control through fear, through force. It is not disempowering, but empowering. We live in a time when we have technologies, not only of communication that spans the globe in a manner of minutes, but of destruction that spans the globe in a matter of minutes. The mix of high technology and the dominator model is potentially disastrous. Fortunately, there has been movement toward the partnership model. If there hadn't been, we would be talking about democracy, about human rights, about an education where each child can realize her or his individual potential. But unfortunately, there are still many elements in our education that we have inherited from these earlier times. Times when ideas such as democracy, human rights, individual potential were simply unknown. This is why we so urgently need a complete reassessment and yes, reconfiguration of education today.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THREE ELEMENTS OF PARTNERSHIP EDUCATION**

### **Process, Content and Structure**

**RIANE EISLER:** Certainly we don't want to discard everything in education; we want to retain the best practices in teaching. But we also want to open our intellects and our imaginations to new ways of learning and teaching. Ways that can help young people reclaim the joy of learning that every child is born with that can empower young people to be the best they can be. Partnership education is appropriate for the post-industrial economy, which requires men and women who are creative, who are flexible, who know how to work in teams rather than just giving or taking orders, who are lifelong learners. Partnership education combines three integrally interconnected elements. Process, how we learn and teach; content, what we learn and teach; and structure, the learning environment.

## **Process: How We Teach**

**RIANE EISLER:** One of the major differences between dominator and partnership education is that children are real partners in their education. And we all know that when we become involved, we take more responsibility. Not only that, when we feel connected to our school, we are not alienated.

**JOE SZWAJA (Teacher, NOVA School):** I think that when Riane Eisler and NOVA High School discovered each other in the mid-90s, I think that she was correct in thinking that NOVA kind of is a partnership school, but it's without knowing about her ideas. I think we were, in some ways anyway, embodying her ideas or trying to work towards those ideals of cooperation and mutual support and hierarchies of actualization rather than hierarchies of fear or domination. It has given us a language and a methodology with which to analyze the way we do things at NOVA. And I think a number of the teachers have found it very useful.

**RIANE EISLER:** Some of the methods that we use in partnership process are empirically proven methods, methods that many of use are already familiar with: Child-centered education, project-centered education, collaborative education. But what the difference is that in partnership education, these aren't just add-ons, they are really integrated into the entire learning fabric. So for example, through peer-teaching as a regular procedure. What students really learn to do then, is to really become familiar with their material, to really think deeply about it. And we all know, that one of the best ways of learning—anybody who's ever taught knows this—is actually by teaching.

**DAVE KETTER (Teacher, NOVA School):** I make it a point as a teacher to never do for students what I think they can do for themselves. It's quite important for us as teachers to get students talking to each other and not just the teacher talking to the group or the group talking to the teacher and answering questions. And peer teaching is a major aspect of that.

**JOSH BREWER (Student, NOVA School):** So in Mr. Sims' class specifically, we've had this thing where a student or a group of students will take home a packet or chapter or something that they've researched on their own and bring it back into the class and present it and be the teacher of that class for 10 minutes or a day, at some point we'll get to that. I think that's really helpful because you're getting a different viewpoint than you would. You're not having the same person or two people present every day, so hearing things from a different voice from a different person, with their influence in it, is really helpful.

**MURIEL MONTGOMERY (Student, NOVA School):** I think you learn more this way because instead of being subjected to one point of view, like the teacher talking and you listening, it's the teacher bouncing off ideas and students

bouncing off ideas off of other students. So instead of hearing one view, you get, like, 10. Just socially, you get interaction with other people. And learn how to politely receive ideas. If I see somebody who's not talking maybe open their mouth and act like they're about to talk, I kind of don't say anything if I've been saying things. I see that a lot, just courtesy and conversation: people encourage other kids who haven't spoken to speak. And I think that's really neat because in more traditional classrooms that I've been in, that's not the case at all.

**DAVE KETTER:** I've found at NOVA that my teaching style fits in quite naturally here and a good chunk of that is to create a democratic classroom. And by that I mean that not necessarily that students have the power to decide all things, but there's tricky weaving together of student interests and teacher knowledge and mentoring in a way that respects where students are at, and includes their interests, and includes their backgrounds with what needs to be taught.

**JOSH BREWER:** Teachers here are here because they want to do something differently and they want to be around students who are willing to take charge and do things that they'd like to be doing, but at the same time, doing real high school work that needs to be done to graduate.

**RIANE EISLER:** Well, teachers of course, in a partnership education, still instruct. But they also act as mentors, as facilitators. They help young people create a caring community of learners.

**ELAINE PACKARD (Principal, NOVA School):** Certainly, the role that the teacher plays in helping the student do independent study or study away from school or to find—help them do a project that they're very interested in, to give them outside help, to go way beyond just your standard 50-minute classroom and then you see them the next day. And in most schools, that's not happening at all, where you really develop a relationship that is pretty pivotal in many students' lives.

## **Content: What We Teach**

**RIANE EISLER:** As important as partnership process is, it alone is not enough. We learn not only from what we experience, but from stories. Some of the most powerful mental maps that we form, we have learned from the stories that we're told, from the narratives. And that's one of the reasons that partnership education pays a great deal of attention to content, to what we teach, to the curriculum. If we really think about it, every curriculum is woven around a particular conceptual framework, around basic assumptions. Assumptions that are then communicated through the curriculum, assumptions about what is valued, or not valued in a society. Fortunately, we already have quite a few partnership elements in the

curriculum. But unfortunately, we also have many elements that we have inherited from earlier times that oriented more to the dominator model. For example, we tell kids, “don’t be violent.” But what are the dates that we ask them to memorize? The dates of wars. So aren’t we really teaching young people that, if you want to get into a history book, go kill somebody? Aren’t we really perpetuating the values that we don’t want to perpetuate? And the problem is that this is so imbalanced because so little attention in the curriculum is given to non-violently achieved gains, the social reforms to which we owe just about all the good things in our lives. If we don’t want young people to be alienated and apathetic, we need to show them that non-violent change is possible, and that they can make it happen.

**JOE SZWAJA:** I had already used Riane Eisler. Actually, my first class at NOVA ever, my world history class, ancient history, because I felt that her model is a really intriguing one in terms of showing other possibilities, other examples, different than the sort of militant, violence-laden approach that we’ve been taught so often. I always thought that the idea that human nature is somehow violent and negative is only looking at one side of it, and I thought she provided a wonderful framework and set of examples to refute some of those assumptions.

## The Partnership Curriculum Tapestry

**RIANE EISLER:** In the design of the partnership curriculum, we combine three strands of threads: vertical threads, horizontal threads, and cross-stitchings. The vertical threads tell a story. They tell the story of cosmic, planetary and cultural evolution. Of really the adventure of life on this earth, not as a predetermined process, but as an evolving adventure in which at every turn, there are alternatives, there are different possibilities. Children would still learn about say, biological evolution, they’d learn about natural selection, they’d learn about survival of the fittest, but they would also learn about something they don’t learn about now. About the evolution of love, of empathy. It’s interesting because Darwin himself, in the book that he wrote after *Origin*, he emphasized this. He emphasized that at the human level, we begin to see different dynamics, including love and what he called the moral sense, moral sensitivity.

**DAVE KETTER (to his class):** How many of you studied Darwinian evolution? You know, you had a biology class; you know natural selection, things like that. Okay. What you got is probably the very basic, bare-bones stuff. And Eisler, Satori, Brian Swim and all them say it’s an incomplete story and because of that, it’s caused a lot of problems, that we kind of view ourselves as surviving because of our competitive spirit. But Eisler wants to point out, and again all these other thinkers do too, that that’s not all the story.

**(to the camera)** As we study early human evolution, we'll also take a look at how those factors of evolution, the natural selection and random variation are inadequate to explain human evolution, and how caring, love and a sense of empathy became primary factors that are now at work in human evolution and what difference that makes to our outlook and the possibilities for humans in the future.

**RIANE EISLER:** I want young people to have the benefit of the new scholarship on evolution. Scholarship that shows the importance of cooperation, not just fierce competition, in evolution. I think that they're entitled to know that women were there, which you really wouldn't know if you look at the conventional texts and the museum dioramas; we're just not present. That in fact, mother-child bonds were one of the most important aspects of the evolution of love. Because by the grace of evolution, we humans received bio-chemical rewards of enormous pleasure, not only when we are loved, or cared for, but also when we love or care for another, be it a child, be it a friend, be it a lover, be it even a pet. We all have experienced this, but it's left out of the conventional narratives, and it needs to be put in.

**SARAH PIRTLE:** I do a timeline activity that I call the "lost history of peace." (to her students) Can you, Jessie, show me on this string where you think, if this is today, and this is way way back then, when do you think war might have begun?

**JESSIE:** Here.

**SARAH PIRTLE:** Could be there. I'll take three guesses. Sarah, you get the next guess.

**SARAH:** Right here.

**SARAH PIRTLE:** And Valbona, what's your guess?

**VALBONA:** There.

**SARAH PIRTLE:** Wait till you find this out. War began right there.

**STUDENTS:** No!

**SARAH PIRTLE:** And for all this many years, people lived without war. (to the camera) Now most adults make the same guess. They guess early on in the timeline as the place when widespread warfare began. If we want to find the place where people used weapons, we have to keep going through the Paleolithic. And this shows us that the history of humans is not a history of endless war. It's when we keep going to this spot right there, this marks 6,300 years ago. The archeologist Maria Gambodis shows that this is the time when the first invasions began to happen in old Europe. These are Neolithic villages. And so I want children to be able to really feel this long history of mutual aid that's our true legacy.

**RIANE EISLER:** The partnership curriculum has two sets of horizontal threads. One of these are the traditional academic subjects: literature, math, science. But these are interwoven with the vertical threads. And the other set of horizontal

threads, which are also very important, are the interests, the concerns of the students themselves. Matters such as the media, ethics, relationships, the environment, sexuality. If we interweave what we teach with student interest—well, we all know, that for real learning, we have to be able to relate it to our own experiences, to our own lives.

## Media Literacy

**RIANE EISLER:** In our time, when so much of the education that young people are receiving is not at school, it's from the larger culture, and particularly from the media. In fact, by the time a child starts school, they've already had a huge part of their education. And what are they really being educated for? So much of what they're educated for is to value qualities, behaviors appropriate for dominator, rather than partnership relations. Qualities and behaviors have caused so many problems. I mean, think about in action entertainment and the news. What do we focus on? Violence, killing, hurting. You look at sitcoms, and so much of them, they seem innocent, but they make cruelty, cynicism, insensitivity seem fun.

**[CLIP, "Seinfeld"] Jerry:** *Well, see the thing of it is, you know, there's a lot of ugly people walking around. But they don't know they're ugly because nobody actually tells them.*

*[Laughter]*

**George:** *So what's your point?*

**RIANE EISLER:** You look at some of the talk shows, and they capitalize on human suffering. This gives young people a very very distorted view of what it really means to be human. A very partial, one-sided view. So schools have an enormous responsibility here. And yes, media literacy skills informed by this partnership-dominator continuum as an analytical lens, they're really vital self-defense strategies for young people. Even more so than in the curriculum, the gender stereotypes and the relations between women and men are so misrepresented. I mean, we're led to believe that everybody has a wonderful time in relations where girls and women are humiliated. Look at some of the videos, the music videos. What's the message about what is a good relationship, what's a fun relationship? And this is not only bad for girls, it's very bad for boys because boys, too, I mean they want that caring connection, that good relationship. Can't get that in that kind of relationship. As I said, there's a third set of threads, the cross-stitching. And these are integrated, again, into the entire learning tapestry. For example, multiculturalism, gender balance, environmental sensitivity, not just as add-ons, but as something that is integral to the entire learning tapestry.

## **Multiculturalism**

**RIANE EISLER:** If it's just Women's history, if it's just fiesta de Cinco de Mayo, or Martin Luther King Day, something that we talk about on holiday's and then it's forgotten about the rest of the year, young people get it. They understand this is not important. So in a partnership curriculum people of different races and ethnic origins wouldn't just be shuffled in once in a while. They would be there—their needs, their contributions, their aspirations would be part of knowledge and truth.

## **Gender Balance**

**RIANE EISLER:** We're so used to a curriculum that really comes out of a worldview of ranking that we don't even notice it. The ranking of us over nature or the ranking of half of humanity over the other. In the traditional curriculum, that's how it's presented. We're still emphasizing values such as aggression, conquest, violence. Values that are stereotypically associated in the dominator mindset with masculinity. And very little attention is given to values stereotypically associated with women, with femininity. Nurturance, caring, non-violence, activities on which we all depend to live. So we give a very imbalanced picture of what is important. As we shift to the partnership curriculum of course not only can we then get away from these rigid straightjackets that so limit both women and men, but these values begin to rise in status. They become more respected. As women and men are questioning some of these stereotypes these qualities of caring, non-violence, nurturance—they belong to both women and men. They are part of our full human repertoire.

## **Structure: The Learning Environment**

**RIANE EISLER:** The third component of partnership education, in addition to process and content, is structure, the learning environment. And here I want to emphasize something. A partnership structure does not mean a completely horizontal organization. That is troublesome, that's laissez-faire and it leads to all kinds of problems. There are hierarchies but they're hierarchies of actualization rather than domination. Leadership is empowering rather than disempowering. Now when we model this kind of leadership and when we build the structures—because you know I would say, you can't sit in the corner of a round room; the structure is so very very important—when we offer that to young people, we're really offering them experiential education in democracy.

**ELAINE PACKARD:** There's something about the dynamic aspect of an environment where you're partnering all the time. It's not a static environment.



There's always that exchange going on, the pros, the cons, the I-don't-want-to-well-maybe-we-shoulds. There's always that negotiating. So there is never a moment where we're not trying to figure out something here together.

**SARAH PIRTLE:** The thing about social skills is that we can't just say, 'here's how you need to act,' and expect that it will work. That's why I love interactive games especially with songs because these give opportunities for them to figure out who hasn't had a turn yet. Or, how am I gonna handle the bully. Or, what do I say when I want to be part of a group. It's handling these problems together that are helping them build their understanding.

**RIANE EISLER:** Schools that are moving toward an integrated approach—partnership, process, content and structure—they're characteristically violence-free schools, but more than that they are schools where young people are much more self-directed and yes, young people relate to themselves and to others with much more respect and much more caring.

**DAVE KETTER:** Another strong fit between the partnership model of education and NOVA is the emphasis on caring. And it's rare, it's extremely rare, that a fight or some kind of altercation occurs here at NOVA and that is great for me having worked in other urban high schools where there was a fight a day and some of them are quite, well, more than just mean; they're potentially lethal when weapons come out.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION**

**RIANE EISLER:** Many of us are concerned today at the direction that educational reform has been taking. It is truly a direction that's pushing us back toward an earlier time. A time of more rankings, of more inequality, of more inequity and of more rote learning. Consider this tremendous emphasis on testing. What does it really accomplish? Well, it accomplishes two things and they're both things that, if we think about it, we really don't want them. One, it again ranks—very strictly ranks people. Those on top, and those on bottom. And the way that testing is now being used is also to humiliate those on bottom. We're gonna publish the names of the schools in the newspaper. The other thing that it accomplishes is that it pushes out many of the gains that we've made in really reforming education in a more democratic direction. More time that teachers get to spend with students individually. 'Cause now they have to follow this menu. But not only that, materials that are so important for our future—multicultural materials, materials that are more inclusive of women, environmental sensitivity—those will be gradually crowded out. Many of us are aware that modern civilization is at a crucial turning point. These are critical times. At our level of technological development, this dominator model threatens to go into self-destruct, to take us

to an evolutionary dead-end. We owe it to young people and I feel so passionate about this not only as a scholar and an educator, but as a mother and a grandmother, to give them the education that can help them navigate through these difficult times and at the same time envision a future that can really give us what we humans so want and need. We owe it to them through partnership education to give them a more complete more accurate and, yes, more hopeful picture of what being human can mean.

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