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TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION, OPPORTUNITY AND HOPE

www.logosyork.org

Let's Be Crazy About Our Kids!

by Clay Yeager

"It's better to build healthy children than to repair broken adults."
Frederick Douglass

Finishing high school is not optional. It's essential; particularly for youth who are faced with risk factors in their lives that are often beyond their control – economic deprivation, a family history of drugs and alcohol abuse, early initiation of problem behaviors, to cite just a few. Both in human and financial costs, children who drop out of school before finishing is a recipe for a lifetime of struggle. By all estimates, the cost of high risk youth not graduating from high school is staggering. In most instances the cost is borne by taxpayers.

"Stay in School" Savings

Research over the past decade helps to put this in perspective. Preventing the highest risk youth from a pathway to crime, gangs and drug abuse while remaining in school until graduation represents a value of about \$2.6 to \$4.4 million per youth*. Another recent study clearly illustrates the savings that can be generated simply by increasing graduation rates by 10% in states with the largest urban, big city school populations. Pennsylvania is one. Increasing graduation rates from the current statewide level of 75% to 85% would generate a total savings of almost \$408 million.**

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For decades we have moved away from prevention. Elected officials have chosen 'getting tough' policies that have translated into increased arrests and prosecutions. These approaches, although politically popular, have recently been shown to be largely ineffective. They inflicted incalculable harm on the very communities elected officials thought they were protecting. Today, in the United States, many of the poorest urban communities are producing staggeringly low high school graduation rates. At the same time we are recording the highest incarceration rates in the world.

However, there is plenty of good news too. The research on youth violence, school drop-out, drug abuse and gang involvement provides ample evidence that there are now many well-tested school and community based prevention strategies. They are highly effective in stemming the tide of failure and despair that has gripped too many families and communities. Published research has identified several common characteristics of highly effective community and school based approaches that reduce drug use, crime, gang involvement, delinquency, school drop out and violence.



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Life-Shaping Narratives

by Traci Foster

Schools have narratives that define them. Education commentator Neil Postman explains that narratives tell the story of who our students and educators are, what shapes them and motivates them. These narratives subtly construct ideals, prescribe rules of conduct, provide a source of authority, and above all, give a sense of continuity and purpose. He adds that the purpose of education is best accomplished when students are taught how to live, not how to make a living.

The narratives associated with the urban environment are often troubling. Poverty can be an evil educator. Having no boundaries, and refusing to be ignored, it mostly teaches hopelessness.

The narrative that defines the Logos community is that we're created in the image of God. Reflecting this image, knowledge is more than a tool for securing a job, it's a reflection of God's glory as revealed in Creation. Compassion for a fellow human isn't just a kindness, it's giving a drink of water to Jesus. Preserving families isn't just a way to fight poverty, it's preserving a God-modeled gift to us, a gift expressed so beautifully in the biblical oak tree metaphor, Isaiah 63:3: "They will be called 'oaks of righteousness'".

Why should we all care about quality, urban Christian education? Clay Yeager succinctly explains why quality urban education must be an essential (not optional) commitment. Rev. Carlos Kelly poignantly answers the question, why Christian? Let's explore in deeper, qualitative terms, the life-shaping power of education narratives by considering how these two threads weave together in the lives of Logos students at several ages. (Only their names have been changed.)

Students' Stories: Changed Lives

Kenny is a kindergarten student. He's always smiling. An observer would never guess that his father has just been re-incarcerated. Kenny and his parents have experienced caring support from teachers, other staff and volunteers who take the time to mentor and encourage them. Kenny and Devon are friends. Although they come from very different backgrounds, they are learning and practicing the spiritual art of encouragement. They see the bigger picture. Recently when a classmate



was frightened by a visiting costumed mascot, Kenny comforted her by saying, "Don't worry. I'll protect you." Devon added, "And God will protect you!"

Maria and her third grade classmates enjoy visiting the local library. At the checkout counter, their teacher explained the importance of waiting in line. The librarian looked wide-eyed at the quiet, respectful line of third graders. She gathered several of her co-workers so they could observe the maturity of the students. Maria and classmates heard their teacher give God the credit. Obedience and respect are not simply "soft" abstract concepts. Far from it. We know from research and our own experience as adults that children who can be other-focused and delay their own gratification, will become successful, spiritually mature adults and leaders among their peers.

In a future issue, we will look at the significance of intercultural relationship building. For now, let me simply observe that there is no performance gap related to culture or ethnicity. Students with the holistic support found in schools like Logos Academy tend to perform at or above national standards. At Logos, students have surpassed the national average on the Stanford Achievement Test for eight straight years. On average, our classes were 16% above the national average in reading and 22% above the national average in math. Of students who have graduated from Logos, there are no drop-outs. I think of Andrea and Javier, both seniors at local high schools. Andrea was homecoming queen. Javier loves engineering. Both are leaders in their churches. Both are doing well academically. They are two of a cadre of Logos alumni preparing to graduate, and attend college.

Hopelessness is defeated! Thanks to the God-shaped narrative that continues to guide these students, we all win.

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Get the Heart to Change the Mind

by the Rev. Carlos Kelly

As I was approaching the register of a convenience store, I couldn't help listening to a loud conversation between the cashier and a twenty something customer. They seemed to know each other and the cashier, a more mature person, was trying to convince the young man to think differently about something. I heard the young man say "I am not gonna worry about bein' careful with nothing, I think I will live up to 30 years of age". The cashier protested, and I too was alarmed. I entered the conversation: "I think that you deserve better than that, don't say that". He answered me: "People want to live a long life and then comes somebody with a car and runs over them and kills them. So I am not gonna worry; I don't have to be careful".

This is a true story. What is going to happen with that young man? He is going to live doing whatever comes to his mind without thinking of the consequences because he believes there is nothing to lose. The book of wisdom in the Bible says, "At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, 'How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly.'" *Proverbs 5:11-14*

How do we give hope and aspirations to a young man that is frustrated because of many things in life? It is proven that money doesn't solve hopelessness. We see institutions spending more and more money, expecting a different outcome. If we do not affect the heart of the child there is no future for our nation. "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." *Proverbs 23:7*

An intercultural,
Christ-centered urban
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Christian education succeeds in affecting the heart change. I am a witness of this at Logos Academy. Schools such as Logos primarily serve youth who statistically are part of a population growing at an alarming rate: students who drop out, literally and figuratively. An intercultural, Christ-centered urban school provides a rich context for heart change. Educators work to awaken minds, inspire heart change, and equip students to embrace hope and education. With the premise that all are created equal, "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights", a Christ-centered education opens students' eyes to the opportunity for a better life.

The children of York have the same opportunities anyone could have for academic excellence. Racial and territorial prejudice disappear along with hopelessness. As the appetite for virtue is fed, York's children are nurtured to thrive with no limitations. Let us touch their hearts to change their minds. Then education and a better future will make sense for our children.



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Successful approaches/programs:

- ✓ Include families, schools and communities, thereby providing a network of support and protection around children;
- ✓ begin in pre-school and are sustained over time, through elementary, junior and senior high school;
- ✓ focus both on individual development and teaching children the social and cultural competencies they need to successfully navigate within their schools and communities;
- ✓ offer clear and consistent opportunities for active participation in their families, schools and communities;
- ✓ provide youth with opportunities to develop the skills necessary to succeed when presented with opportunities;
- ✓ provide youth with consistent outside recognition and reinforcement for their participation, efforts and accomplishments.

Finally, a word of caution. Any program, despite the power of the research findings, is words on paper. It takes people to give them life and to make them successful. Professor Urie Broffebrenner, the founder of the ubiquitous national Head Start program, was once asked what it takes for children at risk to develop into healthy responsible adults. His reply: "every kid needs someone who's crazy about them".

I urge every member in every neighborhood, in every community, and in every school to be crazy about our kids. It's essential.

*New Evidence on the Monetary Value of Saving High Risk Youth', Cohen, S. and Piquero, A., Vanderbilt University. 2007

** 'Projections of 2003-2004 High School Graduates; Source: Common Core of Data Local Educational Agency and School Surveys, National Center for Educational Statistics, Christopher Swanson





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Logos Academy, grounded in the love of Christ, educates for excellence, offers opportunity and cultivates hope in our community.

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Call Abby Baer at 717-848-9835.*



About our contributors



Traci Foster

Traci Foster, a Logos Academy co-founder, serves as its Head of School. She has received numerous awards, including United Way Volunteer of the Year for education, WGAL Jefferson Award for Outstanding Public Service, and Manufacturer's Association Educator of the Year. Logos Academy was awarded the first York City Unity Award in 2004.



The Rev. Carlos Kelly

The Rev. Carlos Kelly is pastor of St. Paul's ECC in York City, offering services in English and Spanish. Originally from the Dominican Republic, Pr. Kelly and his wife Yanira have three daughters: two have graduated from Logos Academy and one is in 4th grade at Logos. Pr. Kelly serves on Logos' Board.



Clay Yeager

Clay Yeager is the principal architect of Pennsylvania's movement to prevent violence, designing and leading the first corporate sponsorship of science-based prevention efforts in the nation. His consulting firm promotes healthy development of children and communities through strategic partnerships with business, government and the media.