

## DIALOGUE

# EDUCATION REFORM: THE ANSWER IS A CHANGE IN PHILOSOPHY

(Part I)

By Wilbert J. LeMelle, Ph.D.  
President Phelps-Stokes Fund

For nearly a dozen years now a debate has raged in the country over how to reform our schools and properly educate a demographically changing student population. Among structuralists and free-marketeters, the solution to the public school problem can be found in turning large schools into small schools, creating charter schools, contract schools

and ultimately establishing choice schools that will be governed by the competitive principles of market-place education. Another set of solutions, advanced by the principal interest groups in our schools, focuses on issues of governance and control functions: the decision making process about what happens in the school and how school funds are spent. School-based management is an example. Professional educators and

theorists, principally attached to our major Schools of Education, who earlier identified effective education as being teacher-centered and student-centered, are now declaring that schools must become "learning centered." The philanthropic foundation community appears to be placing its hopes upon the findings of researchers and practitioners at our elite colleges and universities. Although these experts have traditionally concerned themselves only

marginally with the problems of underperforming schools in our urban and poor rural school districts, presumably they are prepared to worry about these problems if funds are provided. For those who identify the weakness in our education system with insufficient and unequal funding of schools, the problem is basically one of equity in school financing. Finally, the federal government, sees the answer to our school ills in the establishment of national standards and assessments, without mandating or providing funds to cover the costs of the educational infrastructure and professional development that would be required to realistically achieve such goals.

The continuing decline in school performance despite these aforementioned strategies, over a period of time that should have begun to show real signs of a turn-around, prompts us to wonder whether or not we have been asking the right questions about why our children appear to be getting so little out of their schooling in the United States. Could the problem be as fundamental as the philosophy of education that predominates in American schools - what we teach and how we teach it? In fact, that is the conclusion we have reached.

The debate over under achievement and turmoil in American schools must shift to focus on the very philosophy of education that undergirds the teaching and learning process in our schools. For the last fifty years, as a result of the influence of now questionable learning and child development theories, two things have occurred in our schools: curricula have become less academic and the basic method of instruction is self-teaching, by doing, by discovery, by invention and a reduced role for the teacher as source, interpreter, and transmitter of knowledge.

This prevailing form of teaching and learning may appear to be more scientifically based, something the theorists who fashioned the so-called child-centered philosophy of education clearly wanted to do, but its impact has ultimately been particularly true for poor children from deprived environments who lack the opportunities and the means for acquiring knowledge available to middle income children and who fail to receive the important socializing benefits inherent in the traditional didactic form of classroom instruction. Could the problem be as basic as the philosophy of education that predominates in American

schools - what we teach and how we teach it? Founded on the notion that knowledge exists, that it is always expanding, and that the most effective way to transmit it is through the interpretation and instruction of a teacher who possesses it, the traditional American concept of schooling evolved around these two classical ideas about the learning process. However this idea of learning and teaching may be regarded, it remains a fundamentally adequate approach to achieving the tooling and socializing functions found in a world class education - the kind we are in search of today. The crisis in American education is thus the inadequacy of our basic philosophy about what should be taught in the classroom and how it should be imparted. This is the only conclusion one can draw from the continuing failure of a decade of analysis and experimentation to achieve meaningful "reform" of our schools. By contrast, in virtually every instance when we hear about an achieving school, and there are many, even in very deprived urban areas, the invariable differentiating elements are substantive academic curricula and "teaching" teachers in the classrooms.

To Be Continued.

## HILTON HIGHER EDUCATION

(Continued from Page 8)

**DR. YOSEF BEN-JOCHANNAN:** Egyptologist and world class scholar. Along with Dr. John Henrik Clark, Dr. Ben is one of the African world's most valuable elders.

**BLACK ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:** The Virginia/Washington, DC based publication has become the bible for many folks working in the academy. Frank Matthews and William Cox, thanks for keeping the message out front.

**DR. EDISON O. JACKSON:** President of Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York. Do has been a leader in African American higher education from coast to coast. In my opinion, he ranks among the most innovative executives in the nation.

**ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM & MASS COMMUNICATION (AEJMC):** on a professional level, AEJMC has served as a bridge for a lot of my dissertation research. For example, through their research journals, I have realized that whether we Africans are in the room or not, someone will be conducting research on us.

**DR. ANGELA JORGE:** New York based Afro-Latina professor and writer. Angela has been instrumental in educating us about the similarities and dissimilarities between the African American and Afro Latino world communities.

**NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BLACK SCHOOL EDUCATORS:** NABSE consists of over

four thousand teachers, administrators, policymakers and support personnel. It's membership is international, with affiliates throughout the United States. It's November 1995 conference will be held in Los Angeles.

**MR. EDWARD WILLIS:** Director, Student Unions, University of Toledo. This young administrator is Ph.D. focused, professionally confident, administratively competent and culturally connected. He is "principal administrator" tracked and an excellent model for entry level administrators to connect with.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS (NASPA):** This is probably the premier college student affairs association in the country. Unfortunately, there is still an unwritten but clear assumption that student affairs is secondary to academic affairs.

**DR. LILY GOLDEN:** The African Russian scholar and daughter of Oliver Golden, an African American who moved to Russia in 1931. In 1986, she wrote the book, "Africans in Russia." Golden is the founder and president of the Institute of Africa, Africa Center in Russia.

**THE HUMANITARIAN COMMON MARKET:** Education's conscious raising association. Primarily for educators, business persons, civic leaders, college students, parents, families and international students interested in personal, civil, human and

legal rights guidance and issues.

**DR. RONALD WALTERS:** Professor, Howard University: Diversity is truly important in the academy and the corporate world, however to paraphrase Walters, "it was unity of purpose, not diversity that made the civil rights (human rights) movement so successful."

**ASSOCIATION FOR BLACK CULTURE CENTERS (ABCC):** If there is one college office that is strategically positioned to connect our students with the greater African world, that office will most likely be a member of ABCC. Dr. Fred Hord of Knox College is to be commended for founding this organization.

**HILTON HIGHER EDUCATION** is designed to dialogue with college and world readers. Education is ongoing and certainly not limited to classroom study. Let's talk. (909)899-0650 (bus. & fax).

## Black College Tour '96

Students wishing to participate in the second annual "Unity Through Knowledge" Black College Tour '96 may pick up registration packets at all Clark County Counseling Offices. Registration for the April 1-6 tour that will visit the campus of Clark-Atlanta, Morehouse, Morris Brown, Spelman, Tuskegee, Alabama State University will take place on November 4 & 5 from 1-4 p.m. at the Clark County Library, 1401 E. Flamingo Road. For more information, please contact Kelcey West, tour director, at 878-9729.

Do you regularly travel between Valley View (W) and Maryland Parkway (E), Washington (N) to Windmill (S)?

PUBLIC • NOTICE

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

*You're Invited*

Join us as we present potential solutions and available technologies designed to alleviate the growing traffic congestion in and around the Resort Corridor. We need input from residents and businesses in the area, as well as anyone who regularly travels through the Resort Corridor.

Nov. 13 • 4-7pm

**Thomas & Mack Center**  
4505 So. Maryland Parkway  
Board Room

Nov. 14 • 4-7pm

**Cashman Field Center**  
850 Las Vegas Blvd. N.  
Room #102

Please contact the Regional Transportation Commission at 455-4481 with questions or for more information. Both locations are serviced by Citizens Area Transit. Call CAT@RIDE (228-7433) for route and schedule information.



**Setting the Future in Motion... Today!**  
Resort Corridor Major Transportation Investment Study

## KNOCKOUT PUNCHLINES DELIVERED BY

## GEORGE WALLACE & TOMMY DAVIDSON

"Batman Forever" and "The Tonight Show." "In Living Color" and "Ace Ventura II"



**NOVEMBER 3 & 4**  
\$23.50 per person plus tax  
Reservations **733-5453**

**Sands**  
HOTEL & CASINO

