

# Austin American-Statesman

Lovell A. Jones, "Mandela's passion for education should be inspiration for America," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 11, 2013.

Vince Lombardi once said "the difference between a success and failure is not a lack knowledge, but rather a lack of will." With the passing of Nelson Mandela, we lost an individual who was a model of knowledge and will. In America, we know what to do, but lack a Nelson Mandela. Does this absence signal not only a lack of knowledge but the will to rally around the cause of fighting for equity?

We still are trying to reach a level of both racial and economic equity.

Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Education is the key to address these issues that plague America. We have come far but may be regressing, turning into a society of haves and have nots.

For more than 50 years, focus has been on the symptoms and not the root causes.

For example, we continue to dwell on health care delivery, when this is a small part of what is needed to address the health gap. Providing access does not change behavior; changing behavior involves education. Yet we do things that have not worked and may never work. Here is a novel idea: Let's educate people in a way they can understand, i.e., health literacy?

We already have the tools to address the health gap and arrest the movement to a separate and unequal society. As President Barack Obama has stated, racism and economic inequities are the two causes of increased poverty. So why are we not effectively addressing these issues? Maybe we don't know about the existence of educational programs that address both. I doubt it. Let me highlight a few programs that have been successful — not for a few years, but a decade or more.

The Meyerhoff Scholars' Program run by Freeman A. Hrabowski III at the University of Maryland in Baltimore is an example. Among the undergraduates at this majority institution are the young Meyerhoff scholars who are both valued and mentored. Within this group are academic stars with perfect math SAT scores, athletes who never earned below an A through high school, college kids younger than 20 whose work has been published in scholarly journals, and students who regularly earn A's in such courses as genetics and organic chemistry.

But don't assume all these students are from top prep schools. Many are minorities from poor families, went to public schools in inner city or rural communities. Given a nurturing environment, these students — like all students — can succeed.

A similar initiative at the University of Texas at Austin is the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Consortium, known as IE. The program focuses on a broad array of subjects and not just the sciences. The program's director, Rick Cherwitz, notes: "The key is that IE is not a formulaic program. It is an approach to education focusing on 'discovery, ownership, and accountability.' Its success in increasing diversity owes to the fact that it is not a targeted program. Unlike typical readiness and recruitment programs, it is opportunity-based — getting students to connect learning and doing."

Like the Meyerhoff Scholars' Program, IE has won national acclaim, including recognition by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, Fast Company Magazine, the Council of Graduate Schools, Fortune Magazine, Excelencia in Education and the New England Resource Center for Higher Education — and has been the subject of hundreds of newspaper and scholarly articles. Although the IE model of education has been imitated by other research universities, more programs like this are needed.

One cannot deny that the value of these programs as a vehicle for increasing diversity inheres in what Cherwitz describes as "their capacity to allow students to become entrepreneurs — to discover otherwise unobserved connections between academe and personal and professional commitments." The spirit of these programs seems to resonate with and meet a felt need of minority and first-generation students, facilitating exploration and innovation, by changing the model of education from one of 'apprenticeship-certification-entitlement' to 'discovery-ownership-accountability.' "

So what is the reason for a lack of real support of education, especially for the underserved — a fear of losing control? In the transition that is taking place in South Africa, the loss of control has not lead to mass retaliation against those who were in control. Although not perfect, and they have a long way to go, it is a model that America should and can emulate. We shall miss not only Mandela for his vision and grace, but also for his will to use knowledge to make life better for us all. Let's keep in mind Mandela's words: "It always seems impossible until it's done."

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