

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

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Abell Salutes: The Study of Non-Traditional Languages (Chinese, Japanese, Russian) in the Baltimore City Schools

"These students are unique in the country."

In Baltimore City College, students are studying Chinese, Japanese and Russian; in Poly, Chinese and Russian; in Western High, Chinese and Russian. Up until three years ago, these same students would most likely have been studying French, German or Spanish—languages traditionally taught in American schools because American society was in fact an extension of the Western European. And in the world of the 19th and 20th centuries that those young people were expected to live and work in, these languages were identified as the most important languages to know.

But now it is 1990, and the international world is changing dramatically. Today, the languages of Russia and China and Japan are also included in the languages young people need to know if they are going to be a part of the world of the 1900s and beyond.

That is why these several hundred students at City, Poly, Southern, Western and Patterson are studying Russian, Chinese and Japanese—thought only a few years ago, in terms of public school curricula, to be exotic. No more: The teaching of these languages is now thought to be, by students, faculty and families, a timely and creative response by the Baltimore City Public Schools, with support from The Abell Foundation, to the challenges of change in the international order. Ms. Yueh Chien and Mr. Jian-Min teach Chinese to about 100 students in Poly and Western. "Three years ago when we started," Ms. Chien says, "we only had about 50 students. Today we teach about 100, and the interest in the course seems to be growing. The first and second year's

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Project RAISE in Baltimore: Mentoring as Prevention and Cure

By structuring a program that brings together mentors with mentees, RAISE hopes to provide the "caring connection" for at-risk children — and so improve their life chances.

What is it in the educational experience of wealthy school districts that enables its students as a general rule to learn more than do the children in the poor districts? Smaller classes? More books? Better teachers? Conducive learning environment? Enriched curriculum? Probably some or all of these things are making the difference. But a program in Baltimore called "RAISE" (Raising Ambition Instills Self-Esteem) believes a critical something else belongs in that mix: the "caring connection" often present in middle and upper income families. "Adults being there for children, as mentors—role models, friends and advisors"—that is the way Kalman Hettleman, president of the Baltimore Mentoring Institute that administers the RAISE program, describes the caring connection. "Unfortunately, many children from low-income, unstable families don't get the kind of encouragement and sense of worth that comes from closer relationships with adults. The children lack what so many other, more fortunate young people are able to take for granted: positive role models and nurturing adults in families and communities. If RAISE can fill some of this gap, we have a good chance of making a vast difference in the lives of these children."

Although as a first objective RAISE aspires to decrease the incidence of dropout, teenage pregnancy and parenting, substance abuse and anti-social behavior among the high-risk students, its overall

objective is no less than that of providing these same students with a foundation for living a productive, achieving and fulfilling life. The RAISE program is a seven-year commitment to thirteen groups, each with approximately 60 students. The commitment is made jointly by RAISE, Inc., a nonprofit corporation in Baltimore City, and sponsoring organizations—such as churches and businesses, each of which adopts one student group for seven years. The students are selected from public schools in Baltimore City which have large percentages of very low-income, low-achieving children. "Children in the RAISE program," Hettleman says, "are among the highest at risk in the city public schools."

How RAISE Works

The RAISE groups vary in style and method of operation reflecting the ideas of the sponsoring organization, but the caring connection is usually created and sustained by the workings of three components: the school-based staff program, the sponsoring organization, and one-on-one mentors.

- The school-based program coordinator is a professional paid by RAISE. He or she acts as counselor, friend, role model. His (her) role, in concert with parents, school and sponsoring organization, is to work at encouraging better attendance, higher grades and socially acceptable behavior, while at the same time fostering and bolstering a caring relationship between student and mentor.

• The sponsoring organizations recruit volunteers to conduct after-school and other group activities such as trips. But the central focus is on the development of strong mentoring programs. Sponsors are responsible for recruiting volunteer mentors and helping to support the mentors' activities, including their training and their subsequent meetings with mentees. The first series of sponsors and student groups, called RAISE I, began in 1988 with sixth graders. These RAISE I sponsors include Church of the Redeemer, New Shiloh Baptist Church, Morgan State University, Goucher College, Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, Maryland National Bank, and T. Rowe Price. RAISE II, a second round of sponsors, began this September, with several student groups in grade two and several in grade six. Its sponsors include three black churches—Bethel AME, Union Baptist, Zion Baptist—and Baltimore City (government), Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions and Harambee' (a coalition of white and black Presbyterian churches).

• The mentors are recruited from within the sponsoring organizations, their families and circle of friends. Mentors are committed to maintaining a schedule of contacts with the mentees of at least once a week, including face-to-face meetings at least every other week. While sponsors are committed to seven years, an individual mentor's obligation is for one year only. A "Mentoring Manual," published by The Abell Foundation, provides guidelines for mentoring programs, and defines the mission of the mentors: "Mentors should point the way toward the kinds of actions, disciplines and values that make for success and happiness in life and help the mentees to see and strive for wider horizons and possibilities in their lives." Essential to the relationship is the creation and nurturing within it of the caring connection. RAISE provides support for its mentors through orientation, training, judicious matchmaking (mentor to mentee), and ongoing back-up by the program coordinator.

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A Day In the Life of RAISE I Program Coordinator Michael Johnson

At about 8:00 in the morning of a school day in early September, Michael Johnson is standing in the doorway of Lombard Middle School, anchored in the flow of students entering the school. (This same week Johnson will also visit Greenspring, Winston, Chinquapin, Calverton, Canton and Pimlico—all middle schools.) What he is looking to see is if his RAISE students are among them.

Not to his surprise he discovers that one of the RAISE students (call him Robert) is not. He makes some notes, then goes to the principal's office. Here, he talks to the principal about Robert, goes over the list of other RAISE students, and records their lateness or absence. He confers with the principal about certain other RAISE students. It is 9:00 a.m.

Johnson knows what he has to do next.

He has been worried about Robert, who has fallen into a pattern of lateness and absenteeism. Robert lives in Lafayette Public Housing units. Johnson drives directly there and has a talk with Robert's mother. It is 9:45 a.m.

Students from this environment who fail to go to school offer a variety of reasons. Some have no clothes to wear; others have no one around to wake them (families often do not have alarm clocks); others simply have no desire to go and the mother (usually there is no father) cannot handle the rebellious adolescent. In Robert's case, Johnson, acting as a caring adult and employing what he calls "parenting skills," persuades Robert to get dressed and go to school. Johnson drives him there. They get to school at 10:30 a.m.

After taking Robert to his classroom, Johnson goes back to the principal's office and reviews with the principal lateness and attendance records of certain students. He makes plans for follow-up, case by case and, around noon, leaves. He will come back at about 1:00 p.m.

Johnson's responsibilities now are to see to it that the RAISE students attend one of the tutoring programs that will begin right after school. He will personally escort some of them.

Sometimes, for Johnson, and other RAISE Coordinators whose days have been spent similarly, the day does not end at 5:00 p.m. After dinner there are still

meetings to attend, with sponsors, mentors and parents.

Johnson himself spends the evening at a meeting of mentors at the Church of the Redeemer.

He leaves at 11:00 p.m.

He will be up at 6:30 a.m.; at 8:00 he is due at the Pimlico Middle School.

History and Background

RAISE was conceived in Baltimore in 1988 as a variation of philanthropist Eugene Lang's "I Have A Dream" program. While Lang's financial guarantees of a college education for Harlem sixth graders who graduated from high school received media attention for impressive results (over 40 of the children graduated and about 30 are in college), Lang himself and observers of the program attribute its success more to the caring connection provided in so generous a measure by Lang himself and a paid staff person.

Mentoring goes back at least to Homer. In the "Odyssey," Athene assumes the shape of Mentor, the trusted friend of Odysseus, and whispers advice to Odysseus' son, Telemachus. Mentoring is as old as the notion that the young will want to imitate the old; the uneducated, the educated; the have-nots, the haves. Always there have been men and women who have had aspirations (these, the mentees) and other men and women (mentors) willing to help them achieve them. Obviously, mentoring can be seen to be of special importance to low-income, high-risk urban youth who may lack community bonds and role models. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center, "Students who drop out of school often cite the lack of a single person who cared about them as one of their primary concerns for leaving."

"There is," Hettleman says, "growing national evidence that mentoring programs might fill the gap and make a difference. The Big Brother/Big Sister program is an exemplary model. Its accomplishments are well recognized, but its reach has been limited by its relatively high cost and its difficulty in recruiting mentors. Nor has it historically served the very at-risk inner city children. In recent years there has been a proliferation of other models, varying in the characteristics of mentors and mentees, and in the scope, size and intensity of the programs. But RAISE is

clearly unique in its sustained focus on the highest risk students and its use of sponsoring organizations as the source for mentors. We have sought to create a model with the potential to make a large, measurable difference and to be widely replicated. Thus, the RAISE blend of paid and volunteer interventions keeps a close eye on the per-pupil cost of large scale replication."

How Is RAISE Funded?

The Abell Foundation has made separate seven year commitments to RAISE I and RAISE II and has funded the Baltimore Mentoring Institute, a nonprofit agency that administers both. Other large funders that have made seven-year commitments are the Caplan Trust, the Straus Foundation, the Joseph Meyerhoff Family Funds, the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund and the Hoffberger Foundation. Total grant commitments exceed \$4.5 million. The Fund for Educational Excellence operated RAISE until the creation of the Baltimore Mentoring Institute and continues to play an active role in program development.

How Is RAISE Working?

Several typical stories (using assumed names) from the RAISE front lines illustrate both the bad news and the good.

The Mentoring Experience of Kim Roberts: "It's Hard to See Results."

Kim Roberts is a 23-year-old administrative assistant at T. Rowe Price. She graduated from Western High School, completed three years at University of Maryland at College Park and expects to earn her B.A. from Notre Dame. She is one of the RAISE mentors; her mentee is 13-year-old "Sandra"—who provides Roberts with both the satisfaction of seeing the caring connection grow, and the frustration of watching it stagnate. In the course of their mentoring relationship, Roberts will learn much from Sandra about the dimensions of the problems that RAISE is committed to resolve.

Sandra attends Harlem Park Middle—when she attends at all, which to Roberts' dismay, has not been much over the previous month. Not surprisingly, Sandra's grades have been slipping. Roberts has visited Sandra in her home, in the Lexington Terrace high rises, and has

gotten to know the family situation. "It is not the best of environments," Roberts says. "Her mother is a welfare recipient, and on drugs. I have never seen a father, or any male except her older brother, in the family. Communication with Sandra is difficult because the family has no phone. I have to leave messages for her at the T. Rowe Price RAISE Activity Center on Pratt Street. Sandra does not always return my calls. And when she does, she minimizes her problems. I'll talk to her about a failed grade and she'll say, 'Don't worry, I'll do better next month.'"

But Sandra doesn't do better. Month after month, Roberts schedules an evening of fun for her and herself. They plan to see the movie "Glory" and have something to eat. It all sounds great to Sandra, but it never happens. She doesn't show.

"I have been talking over the problem with my Program Coordinator," Roberts says. "She's helping me, but I have to say, it is sometimes hard to see results."

The Mentoring Experience of Patty Pollard: "It's Working!"

Patty Pollard comes to RAISE as a mentor through the sponsorship of the Church of the Redeemer. A teacher by training, she is vice-president of the League of Women Voters. Her RAISE charge is 13-year-old "Darnella," an eighth grader at Dunbar Middle School who lives at her mother's on Orleans Street and at her handicapped grandmother's on Aisquith Street. Pollard has gotten to know both of those households well. Darnella's duties within them will turn out to be one of Darnella's problems.

Pollard believes that Darnella is bright and motivated—but has a strong need for a role model. "I spend time with Darnella a couple of times each week. We'll go to the library on Broadway, we'll run errands, take walks in the Inner Harbor, I'll bring her to my house to spend time with my family. Up to the spring semester, her attendance, grades and general deportment had been improving steadily. Then, something happened. She started slipping—in all the important areas. I have to say I was feeling disappointed."

The strength of RAISE is that it provides several layers of support for everyone working within it. Pollard was not alone; she was able to call her Program Coordinator. Together, they studied the problem.

They concluded that Darnella's attempting to respond to the demands of two households was creating too many tasks and too much tension for her. With the support of her Program Coordinator, Pollard was able to work with the family so that Darnella had more time for study, and for herself.

"Things are really improving now," Pollard says. "Darnella's attendance record, her grades and her general feelings about herself are all improving. And more good news—she's been admitted into the high quality summer program of one of the private schools! RAISE is working for Darnella."

"And," Pollard adds, "It's working for me, too."

From Schoolroom to Executive Suite: The Work of RAISE Coordinator Cassie Smith

The Diggs Johnson Middle School is located on Herkimer Street, in a blue-collar neighborhood just west of Washington Boulevard where it meets the city line. The school itself is an old building, the former Carroll Park Senior High pressed into service only recently when Diggs Johnson's original facility was torn down to make way for the new stadium. But for all its patch-up and make-do ambience, it is where some 300 students are spending their sixth through eighth grades. It is also where Cassie Smith will spend every morning of every work day, as a Program Coordinator for RAISE.

Smith arrives at Diggs Johnson about 8:30 a.m. every school day. Before she leaves some three hours later, she will have reviewed the attendance records of some 60 students; she will have met with the principal and perhaps four teachers to review these same students' social behavior, including problems if any with drugs, or with pregnancies. She will have talked with many of these students about career development, their recreation plans, any problems any student may be having that affects school performance and/or attendance. In the course of her close monitoring activities, a fear of hers is realized. "Rita," a 12-year old girl whose school work has been falling off, is not in school this particular day.

Smith needs to know why.

The first step is to visit the child and talk to her mother. The family lives in Westport, and just before noon Smith is

sitting in the living room of Rita's mother's house. Smith learns that at the heart of Rita's problem is clothes—she does not have enough clean clothes to allow her to go to school five days a week. Smith knows the next step—and she takes it. She drives downtown to the corporate headquarters of T. Rowe Price, one of the largest and most prestigious investment banking houses in the country.

She arrives about 2:00 p.m., and is immediately involved in a round of meetings with her steering committee chairpersons. They will exchange ideas on parental outreach, logistics of moving people and supplies, casework evaluation, volunteer recruitment, mentor coordination. It is a long afternoon, but before it is over, and thanks to the flexibility and largess of RAISE sponsoring organizations, Smith has the money to buy Rita the clothes she will need to improve her attendance record at Diggs Johnson.

At 5:30 p.m. Smith goes home.

After dinner she will telephone parents, mentors, students, volunteers. First thing in the morning she will go to Westport to give Rita the money to buy clothes.

What Are Results to Date?

RAISE is being evaluated by the Johns Hopkins University Center for the Social Organization of Schools, and so far the RAISE data show mixed results. At this early juncture, several sponsors are showing significant gains on such measures as attendance and promotions. Other sponsors are not. The data are being closely analyzed to determine the key variables among the different sponsors and the program components, with start-up snags also a factor.

The results as they are continually monitored and understood will be used to help shape the programming of RAISE I and II, as both proceed along their seven-year paths.

RAISE characterizes itself as a mentoring laboratory and incubator, and the RAISE I experience is already being applied in the development of RAISE II programs. Among the variations in RAISE II is programming that has the 180 students in the three groups beginning in the second grade (compared to RAISE I beginning in the sixth grade). By launching the intervention in the primary grades, the hope is to prevent academic and social problems and to instill healthy habits and

values at an early stage. RAISE believes that the advantages of the earlier intervention may outweigh any disadvantages that may occur with the ending of RAISE's seven-year commitment at the eighth grade. At that time, sponsors and mentors may elect to extend their relationships without formal support.

* * *

RAISE is a bold experiment, and recognized as such nationally. Marc Freedman is a senior associate with Public/Private Ventures, a national social policy think tank based in Philadelphia, PA. The agency evaluates the many social programs designed to provide support for at-risk children, and has the nation's largest mentoring research agenda. Currently, Freedman is conducting a series of studies evaluating mentoring programs operating around the country, and is writing a book, funded by The Ford Foundation and scheduled for publication in the spring 1991, about his findings.

"We have been studying RAISE," Freedman says, "and we find that it's distinguished in at least three important ways.

"First, it is one of the few such programs in the country that attempts to help struggling kids, those genuinely at risk. Many mentoring programs are really designed to help the B and C students, betting on winners; RAISE, focusing as it does on the disadvantaged kids, is betting that the losers can be made into winners.

"Secondly, RAISE is the only mentoring effort that makes such a long commitment to its mentees—seven years. So RAISE is far more long-term than the other programs similar to it.

"Still a third difference. RAISE places much reliance on Program Coordinators. These Program Coordinators can insure that mentoring takes place.

"Overall, I would say that RAISE is one of the most innovative models of its kind in the country and offers our best chance to learn what mentoring can do for kids growing up in poverty."

But before RAISE can be called a successful effort, it must address and answer these challenges:

- Can the RAISE intervention overcome the seemingly intractable barriers that stand in the way of attempts to improve the life chances of disadvantaged children?

- Is it possible to recruit through sponsoring organizations one-on-one mentors on a large scale, and can these mentoring relationships create and sustain a caring connection, and can these caring connections make a difference?

- And finally, can RAISE accomplish these goals at realistic costs, so that its programs can be expanded and replicated?

That is a lot to expect of the caring connection. But given the commitment of RAISE—its mentors, advocates and sponsors—a watchful community has reason to keep its expectations high.

Abell Salutes:

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focus was on the language itself, mostly grammar and vocabulary. But Ms. Chien and Mr. Jian-Min are now introducing aspects of Chinese culture. "In our classes at Western and Poly, white, black and Oriental children together," Ms. Chien says, "we all celebrate the Chinese New Year."

Andrew Tomlinson and Michael Kosibi teach Russian to 140 students in City, Poly and Western. "These students," Tomlinson says, "are in a unique position in the country. Studies show that among the obstacles to trading with the Russians is language. These students are among only 18,000 students in all of America who are studying Russian. Those of them studying the language into the third year are among only 2,000 to be studying the language that many years. So these students are going to be singularly well prepared both to continue their studies in advanced programs, and to find a place in the economy."

The Non-Traditional Language initiative is a four-year program. Students who do well for the first three years are given, at the end of their third year and before they start their fourth, a trip to the country of the language he or she has been studying.

In the end, students taking these non-traditional languages not only get the intellectual stimulation of being exposed to the new and the different of life's experiences, but enjoy, too, the advantages of coming into the working world with increasingly important, in-demand knowledge and skills.