Changing the World Through Education

By Zoe Weil

There is one form of activism that makes the most far-reaching, substantial, and lasting difference and no other form of activism can succeed without it. It's not lobbying legislators or influencing corporate CEOs. Nor is it direct action or civil disobedience. It's not boycotts or "buycotts" of products. It's not edgy spoof ads or other forms of culture jamming. And it's not protests or rallies, either. Even though all of these are important and often succeed at achieving specific goals, none of them, by itself, ultimately creates the kind of change we need to save this planet and the billions of species residing here. The form of activism underlying all others, which has the power to save, restore and make this beleaguered world humane, is education.

In order to create a peaceful, sustainable and humane world, we need everyone to receive a radically different form of education than what is the norm. We need the next generation to:

- Have knowledge about what is happening on our planet to people, other species and the ecosystems sustaining us all.
- Experience reverence and respect for others and a deep understanding that we are all connected.
- Know how to think critically and creatively and to evaluate all information intelligently.
- Appreciate that their lives have the capacity to make a difference through their individual choices, life's work and activism.

If this education were offered to every child, teenager and college student, we would create a generation with the knowledge, wisdom and ability to make sane and humane choices for the future. This education would inoculate such a generation against blind belief in anyone or thing, including talk show hosts, preachers and politicians. It would lift the veils of ignorance, fear, materialism and self-righteous anger. It would protect this generation from being overly susceptible to advertising or the latest fads. It would foster courage, honesty and compassion, paving the way for real solutions.

This education is rare, so we need to promote it. I have no illusions that this is an easy form of activism. But if this form of education begins to take root in our schools and universities, and in all the ways in which we each participate in lifelong learning, it will spread rapidly because it will provide the best path for the safest and healthiest futures for everyone.

This education is called *humane* education, humane meaning, as Webster's *New World Dictionary* defines it, "having what are considered the best qualities" of human beings. Its goal is to create a generation of people with the knowledge, commitment, skills and wisdom to bring about positive changes doing the most good, the least harm and systematically solves the pressing issues of our time. But knowing its name means nothing unless more of us commit to spreading it.

When you think about what role you are going to play in change making, please add to your repertoire teaching. Write letters to the editor about the need for humane education at all levels of learning. If more of us ground our actions for positive change in humane education, those actions will be more successful and more far-reaching. And if more of us turn our attention directly to promoting humane education, we will begin to see a profound and positive shift in all aspects of society. ■

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