

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

Ora na azu nwa

International Village Education (IVE)

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This African proverb is the best way we know of summing up what we believe to be important about education. Never mind that it has been hijacked by Hilary Clinton and various others.

What are the most important factors for successful child development? No-one really knows, at least to any useful degree of exactness. One list suggests it is peers, genes, parents, in that order¹. We believe it takes a community to raise a child successfully, and that this community is made up of personal, institutional and cultural elements.

- The most important personal elements are parents, relatives and friends.
- The most important institution is, by far, the school, but there is also the church, the doctor's surgery, the community centre.
- The most important elements of culture are television, the internet, other mass media, businesses and so on.

What does this mean for education? There are three main strands to our thinking but they all revolve around the central idea that education has to be multi-faceted, diverse, motley, plural, manifold. All educational models that tend to the opposite direction limit the imagination, and our children's potential, by tending to the uniform, to conformity.

1. The first strand is the notion of Internationalism. This implies a commitment to other languages (though this is not necessary), to being a citizen of the world (*cives mundi*, though again this is not necessary), to preparing for a future career that might involve many different jobs in many different locations (even this isn't central), and finally a commitment to learning deeply and regularly about other cultures and other ways of leading lives (this is the core).

This is not the same as simply a nod in the direction of Multiculturalism which is not, in practice, the same thing at all.

2. The second strand is Outdoor and Environmental Education. At its simplest this just reflects a belief that children are not best served being cooped up in variously arid classrooms for the majority of their educational lives. Children are physical animals with a need to express themselves in sometimes fierce physicality. This can be done through sport, of course, but works far better in woodlands and the wild.
3. The underlying theory looks to build on the idea of multiple intelligences, as widely expounded by Howard Gardner (firstly in *Frames of Mind*, 1983) and many others.

In essence this is the notion that it isn't useful to concentrate on a single general mental aptitude, called intelligence and measured as IQ; instead the brain consists of many modules for processing different types of information in different ways.

Although many of the cognitive processes overlap, an education which emphasises the commonalities might make things easier administratively but it does nothing to

1 <http://www.apa.org/monitor/julaug00/parents.aspx>

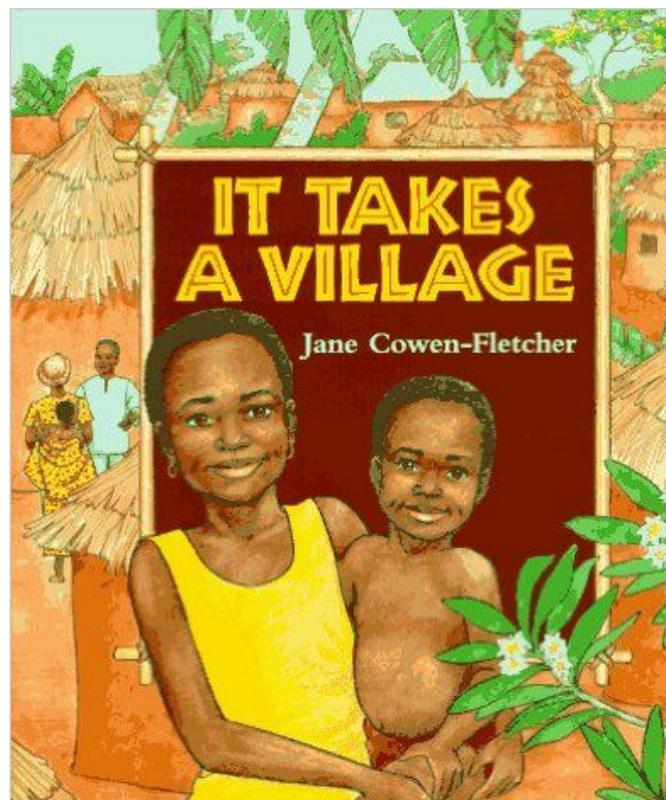
help all those who might be described as not neurotypical.

This notion is emphatically not the same as 'Learning Styles', which is widely discredited and, fortunately, very much fading out of fashion.

So these are the three aspects which we want to emphasise and to bring back into the centre of educational provision.

It takes a village

1. The standard claim is that this is an Igbo and Yoruba proverb (Nigeria)². In Lunyoro (Banyoro) there is a proverb that says "Omwana takulila nju emoi," whose literal translation is "A child does not grow up only in a single home." In Kihaya (Bahaya) there is a saying, "Omwana taba womoi," which translates as "A child belongs not to one parent or home." In Kijita (Wajita) there is a proverb which says "Omwana ni wa bhone," meaning regardless of a child's biological parent(s) its upbringing belongs to the community. In Kiswahili the proverb "Asiyefunzwa na mamae hufunzwa na ulimwengu" approximates to the same.³
2. 'It Takes a Village' (Simon and Schuster, 1996) Bestselling book by Hilary Rodham Clinton. "How children develop and what they need to succeed are inextricably entwined with the society in which they live and how well it sustains and supports its families and individuals⁴ "To raise a happy, healthy and hopeful child, it takes a family, it takes teachers, it takes clergy, it takes business people, it takes community leaders, it takes those who protect our health and safety, it takes all of us"⁵.



2 <http://www.afriprov.org/african-proverb-of-the-month/23-1998proverbs/137-november-1998-proverb.html>

3 <https://www.h-net.org/~africa/threads/village.html>

4 <http://www.amazon.com/Takes-Village-Tenth-Anniversary-Edition/dp/1416540644>

5 <http://www.happinessonline.org/LoveAndHelpChildren/p12.htm>

3. Before Hilary came 'It Takes a Village' by Jane Cowen-Fletcher⁶ (Scholastic Inc) in 1994, a children's story set in Benin, West Africa.
4. It Takes a Village (21 Sep. 2011). Criminal Minds: Season 7, Episode 1. Crime drama.⁷
5. It Takes a Village (2010) TV Movie Comedy Divorced and remarried parents raise a teen aged son together⁸
6. Want Great Longevity and Health? It Takes a Village. When it comes to longevity, the long-standing support of a community is significant. In the U.S., you're likely to die eight years earlier if you're lonely, compared with people who have strong social networks. In Sardinia, "One hand washes the other, and they both wash the face," as Mr. Pinna told me, summing up the social symbiosis.⁹
7. Toni Morrison was quoted in Essence, July 1981: "I don't think one parent can raise a child. I don't think two parents can raise a child. You really need the whole village." The forthcoming Yale Book of Modern Proverbs notes: "The saying is often referred to as an 'African' or a 'West African' proverb; however, no prototype from Africa has been discovered — though several sayings from that continent do urge cooperation in child rearing and other enterprises."¹⁰

6 <http://www.amazon.com/It-Takes-Village-Jane-Cowen-Fletcher/dp/0590465732>

7 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1974554/>

8 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1595848/>

9 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/want-great-longevity-and-health-it-takes-a-village-1432304395>

10 <http://freakonomics.com/2011/06/23/it-takes-a-village/>