

School Days: Please Hold, We Appreciate Your Call

By Prof. MCKINLEY BURT

If you're tired being put through the diabolical electronic maze devised by the phone company in conjunction with a business community that didn't wish to hear your complaint in the first place -- then don't push any more buttons at their insipid commands. Hang up!

But, suppose the recalcitrant institution is your school district and the interaction you seek is not so much electronic as about the need for some good, old-fashioned (and honest) in-your-face dialogue concerning your child's progress in the education system. Even though you are down

to one frayed nerve, you can't "hang up" on your child's future.

Mr. Bierwirth, the departing superintendent, has detailed the problem during his "swan song". "We answered the critical questions that parents had about homework and absenteeism by shoving stacks of [feel good] paper at them." He readily admits that there was a language barrier that focus groups did not overcome.

Somehow, in the midst of all the questioning, arguing and despair over "a failing system", there does seem to be the necessity for asking the ultimate basic question; What is an edu-

cation? What does it look like, what does it feel like and how will we recognize a 'well-educated' product of the system?

We could, of course, rely on the rather circular reasoning of the dictionaries - which, at times, appears to be about as far as some of the district's administrators or curriculum planners have gotten in their development of learning paradigms. Or in translating them.

And defining this rare beast may be as difficult a task for the educator as was the problem that Supreme Court Justice had in defining 'por-

nography'; "I can't tell you what it is exactly, but I sure know it when I see it!"

And I'll warrant you that the overwhelming majority of parents in the Portland School District know whether or not their children are getting a good education (Parents have always known, since schools were invented). But they should not have to be linguists or erudite educationists - when their concerns about basic school responsibilities are met with glowing descriptions of Cims and Cams.

Not that those "Year 2000" educational goals weren't just what the

'doctor' (and industry) ordered. And, of course, we have President Clinton in typical flamboyant paraphrase exclaiming, "National Standards will ensure 21st century competence." But those of us who for several decades have been critics or activists in respect to the Portland School District know that, first, you have to get past the "Humboldt Syndrome."

That is to say that despite all the rhetoric, polemics and statistics released to the media, we have thousands of parents - both white and black - complaining that "Johnny and Mary can't read or count any better in K-6 than I could

in the third grade." And believe me, that deficit is seldom if ever made up. Ask me about my experiences as an instructor at Portland State University. "Blowing up schools" is no the answer.

With so many "dumb'em down" practitioners unleashed upon a defenseless population (whole language, blessing that so many children do acquire basic survival skills; but with greatly diminished economic and societal futures. There must be basic, if gut wrenching changes among educator and teacher unions. Con't next week.

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Clowns smile on all

Continued from Front Metro "Muchacha", Spanish for "girl") because it reflected the Hispanic part of her heritage, which also includes French-Canadian. After 20 years as a mime and eight years as a clown, this year she finally had a chance to perform at Portland's Cinco de Mayo celebration.

"One advantage of being a clown is you are no longer white, black, yellow or red," said Bob Benson ("Harley the clown") of northeast Portland. He was dressed as a farmer with straw hat, yardstick yellow suspenders and a humongous horn at this side. "A big hearted clown is blind to colors."

Two African-American girls ran

up to a whitefaced Sunflower the clown, to show their own white faced makeup. Soon the clown had Tiairre Pratcher, 10, of Humboldt Elementary School, and Shanice Wright, 7, of Martin Luther King School, laughing uncontrollably.

"There's an orange guy with a purple hat who invited me to be in the parade," said an excited Jeanette Warthoe, 8, also from Humboldt Elementary School.

Cally-Co the clown took one look at the "Tigerette" makeup on the little African-American girl's face, grabbed her hand and the two marched down the parade competition route for a round of applause and a big smile.

Diversity

"The Call"

The Bridge Builders is calling all African American high school males in pursuit of excellence "When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion."

In the spirit of Umoja, The Bridge Builders is inviting African American high school males to "The Call," an informational session about The Prospective Gents Club 'Rites of Pas-

sage' program. "Rites of Passage" is an African custom that properly prepares youth to become productive adults in their tribes. The Bridge Builders have adapted this concept and created a male-responsibility program that promotes scholarship, high moral character, values and community service.

Participants in The Prospective of Kelley's new 49-page manual, "How To Talk Your Way Out Of A Traffic Ticket".

As a 26-year police veteran, with service on both highway patrol and local police departments, he's an acknowledged expert on traffic tickets, police thinking, police actions and driver reactions.

Kelley believes that being fore-armed with knowledge will not only assist the motorist who finds himself in trouble...but will actually help prevent traffic violations and accidents in the first place.

Advice in the manual includes:
* What a police officer may be thinking as (s) he approaches you.
* Things never to say to a police officer.
* How to put the odds in your favor.
* A list of excuses never to use.

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Gents Club will meet with business executives, college administrators and community leaders while building strong comradeship with a positive peer group that reinforces achievement. Additionally, members have the opportunity to perform with the step and cane precision team, participate in weekly peer tutorial sessions and learn the entire college application process.

Interested candidates and their parents should attend "The Call" on

Sunday, Oct. 5 from 5 to 7 PM or Tuesday, Oct. 7 from 7 to 9pm and hear The Bridge Builders present their Passage concept. Both sessions will be held at the House of Sound -- Isaac/Peggy Brooks Building, 3620 N. Williams Avenue.

Application for membership is limited and open only twice a year, so it is crucial for those who have interest to attend "The Call."

For more information, contact Jacqueline Debnam at 735-9805.

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