

Fall Lecture Series Focuses On Educational Hope For All

Urban Education: Crisis Or Opportunity?

Faced with low test scores and high dropout rates, decaying buildings and competition from other schools, urban education was the focus of the 2000 Fall Lecture Series presented by the School of Education.

The four-part series, "Urban Education: Crisis Or Opportunity," was presented on consecutive Tuesday evenings in October at the Gerald R. Ford Museum in downtown Grand Rapids. It featured four dynamic speakers addressing an array of topics and issues affecting inner-city school children in their everyday pursuits of learning.

The lineup of speakers included Dr. Howard Fuller of the Center for Urban Studies at Marquette University; Dr. Martin Haberman, professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Dr. Robert Slavin, co-director of the Center of Research at Johns Hopkins University; and Maribeth Vander Weele, inspector general of Chicago Public Schools.

Each speaker expounded on subject areas that either contradicted or supported the viewpoints of their counterparts. The emerging common denominator is that urban schools are indeed in need of major reform, and through crisis comes opportunity to change for the better.

New to the format this year was a panel discussion consisting of the evening's keynote speaker and several colleagues from the education profession examining timely topics and relating personal experiences and success stories.

Corporate sponsors supporting the third annual Lecture Series included Beta Design Group, Burger King of West Michigan, Michigan Education Association, Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone, National Heritage Academies, Pioneer Inc., Tower Pinkster Titus Associates Inc. and URS Architects & Engineers.

Urban Reform & Educational Options For Children

Dr. Howard Fuller, a former high school superintendent, has been fighting a battle to improve Milwaukee schools since 1976. Fuller supports charter schools and vouchers.

Fuller said he realizes that there are no magical solutions for school reform, but some things are evident. First, good schools are mission driven, not rule bound. Second, in a learning environment, adults must be held accountable. Finally, to make a positive learning environment, adults must have the highest expectations for all the children.

"We need people with our children who love our children," Fuller said. "You cannot deal with a hip-hop generation of kids with a waltz mentality.

"Positive change can only occur if we face up to the situation that confronts us. People support change — only as long as nothing changes. But if we want to make progress in addressing the problems, we must drastically change the institutional makeup and approaches to education. The ones who need change the most are our poorest children."



Dr. Martin Haberman

Preparing Teachers For Urban Centers

Dr. Martin Haberman developed the nationally recognized "Star Teacher" program, which prepares teachers to be successful in difficult classrooms. He has developed more teacher education programs focusing on children in poverty than anyone else in American education.

"In the largest school districts in the country, there are 1.3 million kids who disappear between the time they are in the eighth grade and the time their classmates graduate," Haberman said. "So

every four years, we fill a city the size of Chicago with no-hopers, who are doomed for lives of desperation and jobs of minimum wage. How long as a society can we create a city the size of Chicago when you have this much poverty and failure?"

Haberman believes that teachers can make the difference, and predicts that 2 million new teachers will be hired by 2010 in the United States.

"It's a great opportunity and the most important opportunity and chance we have (for educational reform)," he said.



Dean Hagerty, right, introduces a panel of educators for a public discussion on school reform headed by Dr. Howard Fuller, second from right, during the School of Education's October Lecture Series.

Teaching Poor Urban Children How to Read



Dr. Robert Slavin

Along with his duties at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Robert Slavin has authored 18 books and is the chair of the "Success For All" foundation that teaches children in urban schools how to read.

Because reading largely determines a child's success in school, Slavin believes that all children can — and must — be taught at an early age.

"We need 100 percent for success for our children in reading, and it's essential that we make the changes children need early in school," Slavin said.

Slavin claims that there are four basic levels of children who read: natural readers who will learn to read no matter what the circumstances; teachable readers who will read successfully with quality instruction; tutorable readers who can learn with additional one-on-one tutoring; and genuine dyslexics, who comprise no more than two percent of all children. Each type of child has different needs early on:

- Natural readers must be made to be good readers and good writers;
- Teachable readers need teachers with high-quality inservice backgrounds and high-quality materials to learn from;
- Tutorable readers need tutors at a one-on-one level at a young age;
- Dyslexics need more research to find solutions.

Slavin also added that students who are not native speakers of the English language need special strategies as well.

These strategies should be implemented at three levels, beginning in the pre-school and kindergarten stage where background knowledge, alphabet, phonemic awareness and a systematic approach to story-telling is learned. In the first grade, Slavin recommends a consistent balance of instruction on both phonics and meaning with a rapid pace of instruction, repetition and frequent assessments of each child's performance to help detect difficulties at the earliest stages. Then tutors should become involved.

Slavin also recommends 20 minutes of home reading each day for all students. Goals by the second grade and beyond include building comprehension, fluency, vocabulary and pleasure.

Improving Urban School Culture

Maribeth Vander Weele is a former investigative reporter for the Chicago Sun Times, where she exposed rampant improprieties and mismanagement of Chicago Public Schools. When Mayor Daly assumed control of the Chicago Schools, he hired Vander Weele to oversee and correct the multitude of problems within the nation's third largest school system.

As the Inspector General of Chicago Public Schools, Vander Weele has designed and recommended numerous reforms, including programs addressing social promotion, truancy, teacher accountability, corruption, alternative schools and employee ethics.

"After five years of massive reform, there are wide-scale improvements," Vander Weele said.



Maribeth Vander Weele