

INTERNALIZING MITIGATION EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS

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We are uniting our efforts at this conference in order to determine the best ways to succeed in providing earthquake preparedness education in our school systems.

There is one concept I wish to put before you, that I believe should be a major ingredient in our deliberations. I firmly feel if we ensure that INTERNALIZATION of earthquake preparedness information is a major result of our activities in our home areas, we will all have a resounding positive effect on earthquake preparedness during the next generation.

During the fall of 1985, I traveled to Santa Cruz, Bolivia to assist in developing emergency planning as it related to severe flooding that the city experienced in the past. One Sunday, our host took us to a small village north of Santa Cruz so that we could participate in their annual festival. Bolivia is a poor country, when you consider per capita income, and education levels are very low. Consequently basic sanitation education is greatly lacking among the people.

The oxen and cattle roamed freely about the church yard where the major activity of the festival was taking place. The major activity was preparing food to sell to the festival participants. Flies were busily moving between animal droppings and the food displayed on the tables. Little concern was paid by the villagers to these insects visiting their culinary offerings. I, on the other hand, began having visual flashbacks to 1949, when I was a Boy Scout. I could vividly see the magnified picture of a fly's feet leaving deposits of bacteria on food. The picture was in a health merit badge study manual. We had to respond correctly to the majority of questions put before us by the Scout Master in order to earn our merit badge. So, at the ripe old age of nine, I was eager to learn.

The bacteria being deposited by the fly in the picture was tuberculosis bacillus. According to the picture's caption, the fly had just recently collected bacteria by walking on cow droppings. Needless to say, I didn't eat any of the food at the festival in Bolivia. Later that day, I asked a Bolivian physician about the incidence of tuberculosis in Bolivia. He stated it was extremely high.

The reason I didn't eat the food was not because I'm squeamish about insects. I'm not. But rather because 36 years previous to that experience in Bolivia, I had internalized the information that would help guard my health and prolong my life. For 36 years, thereafter, I used that information whenever a situation called for it. That information had become incorporated into my thinking process. Even 36 years later it affected my behavior. I did not eat so that I would not ingest bacteria possibly provided by those little bitty fly feet.

INTERNALIZATION: TO INCORPORATE (AS VALUES OR PATTERNS) WITHIN THE SELF AS CONSCIOUS OR SUBCONSCIOUS GUIDING PRINCIPLES THROUGH LEARNING OR SOCIALIZATION.

It is this concept of "Internalization" that we must utilize in preparing our children for the potential damage of earthquakes they may experience in their adult lives.

Yes, as children it is important they learn to find a safe place when the ground starts shaking.

Yes, as children it is important they learn what they must do and what they must not do after an earthquake.

But it's equally important for them, as children, to internalize knowledge that will motivate them, as adults, to insist: that school boards mandate earthquake resistant school buildings where appropriate; that school boards eliminate earthquake hazards in, on or around those buildings; and that school boards ensure that earthquake preparedness education is included within the curriculum.

It is also important for children to internalize knowledge that will cause them, as adults, to insist that hospital boards, public officials, and regulating agencies ensure that appropriate earthquake resistance design be utilized in all hospitals and nursing homes.

It is equally crucial that children internalize knowledge that will direct them, as adults, to vote for appropriate seismic design building codes and the effective enforcement thereof, within their cities, counties, and states.

Finally, it is important for children to carry internalized knowledge that persuades them, as adults, to appropriately prepare their homes and families for earthquakes: to remove earthquake hazards; to tie down water heaters; to be prepared to turn off utilities; and to store essentials for a two week period of isolation.

Yes, I firmly believe that we must keep this concept of internalization in mind as we interact during this conference, and especially after we return to our home areas to implement earthquake preparedness curricula in our schools. For, if we succeed - and we must succeed - we will effect a change in the next generation that will prevent unnecessary death and injury when earthquakes occur. This is our overall goal, isn't it?

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