

Impact of US Presidential Elections on Child Development

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ABSTRACT

“THAT DOG DON’T HUNT”

....A billboard highway election campaign image: Examining the impact of the 2004 US presidential billboard election campaign image on kindergarten & middle school children in Milledgeville, Georgia: The Deep South: The African Perspective of a non-voting international scholar!

“If we can reconcile ourselves with the mysterious truth that the spirit is the life of the body seen from within, and the body an outer manifestation of the life of the spirit-the two being really one-then we can understand why the striving to transcend the present level of consciousness through acceptance of the unconscious must give the body its due, and why recognition of the body cannot tolerate a philosophy that denies it in the name of the spirit (Jung, 1968).

“What could the US presidential elections do to school going children in the USA?”

As educators, parents, community leaders, politicians, onlookers, religious leaders, and you name it, we have at one time or another heard the term “No Child Left Behind”. This is a very powerful term, and act, and it is fascinating to stop and reflect on how the 2004 US presidential elections might have or not “left any child behind”. As a scholar, who is interested in studying children and families, I got very fascinated in watching young children in US schools participate vigorously in mock elections on the 2004 US Presidential elections. I came up with various intriguing questions such as: “What do US presidential elections do to young children? Is it true that when young school going children are asked to participate in mock US Presidential

School Elections, the outcomes portray the thoughts or political affiliations of the children's parents? Do school mock US Presidential elections' outcomes undermine or promote the intended goals and purpose in life? Do these mock elections promote or seriously batter young children's self esteem? Is there counseling provided to victims of "violated self-esteem" from the aftermaths of the trauma that might be encountered from school mock elections?"

Self-Esteem

In 1998 I carried out an international research study in Zimbabwe where, using phenomenological approaches, I examined the self-esteem of orphans 3 to 18 years old, whose parents died of HIV/AIDS. Self-esteem seems to be a prerequisite for developing other important components of psychological health, and for mental health, self-esteem is viewed as essential by luminaries such as Allport (1961), Erickson (1968), Jung (1954), Maslow (1970), Rogers (1961), and Chigubu (2000). Following a survey of psychological literature on self-esteem, I decided to expand this knowledge as it related to the 2004 US presidential elections and the impact on young children.

Outsider Looking In

As an international scholar, a mother of two school going young girls, a working parent whose citizenship is Zimbabwean, a researcher who is not eligible to vote in the US, and a child advocate who does not belong to either Democratic or Republican party, it was very interesting to study my two young children (both US citizens), as they participated in their respective schools' mock presidential elections. Motivated by the works of Piaget (1980) regarding the preoperational and concrete operational stages of children's thinking, I decided to study my children's intellectual development through their mock participation in the politics of electing the 2004 US president within the confines of their learning environments in the school settings. One of the benchmarks that would validate the usefulness of this study to future presidential candidates, researchers interested in this topic, education policy-makers, educators, parents, child advocates and others, is the fact that this author would have no political inclinations to either parties, thereby her neutral stance as an "outsider looking in", brings some degree of wisdom and natural intellectual capacities which might not deserve to go unrecognized. Consequently, let me briefly walk you through some of the exciting encounters that I had as I watched my six year old kindergartener that I will give the pseudonym "Polly", and my 11 years old middle schooler whose pseudonym we will call "Becky".

Billboard Political Election Campaign Awareness Advertisement

A few days prior to the 2004 US Presidential elections, on a warm sunny morning, I drove my kindergartener Polly to her Public elementary school when we realized something new about this particular landmark. On one of the familiar billboards on the highway that takes us to Polly's elementary school, there was a very conspicuous eye-catching inscription in bright bold letters written on the extreme top. The following election campaign names: "KERRY – EDWARDS" were placed on a strategic position where any driver, passenger, cyclist, pedestrian, the wheelchair bound, and you name it would clearly see it. Right below those names and somewhat in the middle of the billboard, there was a beautiful picture of a pretty fluffy poodle dog that had the most sophisticated look ever imagined. This poodle was nicely trimmed, combed, and decorated with a garland of colorful ribbons, which gave that poodle a touch of sophistication. At the bottom, and just below that colorful pretty dog, there was this print in bold: "That Dog Don't Hunt".

Kindergartener's Choice for Mock 2004 US Presidential Elections

As I drove past this billboard, my six year old Polly was excited to see the picture of her favorite pet that she has always longed to possess, all in vain due to "ongoing sizeable holes" in the family wallet! This billboard resuscitated her unfulfilled dreams of owning a poodle as a pet. This encounter with a billboard poodle was the best gift she could set her eyes on ever. She relived some of those "make-believe" episodes that Piaget teaches us about! At the glance of this billboard picture, Polly could not help screaming: "Woo I love that dog, that's pretty, and I saw the top part, it said Kerry! Yea! Yes, it said Kerry, Go Kerry! Go Kerry! Go Kerry!" she exclaimed and dancing vigorously in her car seat to the point of kicking the driver's seat. I could see that the young girl had not only become politically literate, but she also had become politically charged at age six. That alone, ignited my curiosity. I asked her: "So whom are you going to vote for Polly?" She answered, "Of course, I will vote for Kerry". She mentioned Kerry's name with untold joy and exuberance. I went on further to ask her: "Why do you want to vote for Kerry?" She had two intelligent answers for her age: "1) Kerry has a dog that I like. 2) He also has a cat", she said. I asked her how she knew all that. She said; "Didn't you see his name on that billboard that has the prettiest dog I have ever seen in this whole wide world? A-a-a-and, the other day I also saw Kerry holding a cat on TV. Kerry loves animals, I love animals. That is why I will vote for Kerry". I affirmed to her that she should go for it. "Yeaaa! You go for it Polly, Go Polly, Go Kerry, Go Polly, Go Kerry!" I repeated the rhyme that she soon joyfully participated in too. However, in my mind, I became restless. I wrestled with the idea whether it would be appropriate to explain to her the true mission of that billboard picture (in my opinion)

and what exactly was behind the message on the billboard that read “That Dog Don’t Hunt” (my own interpretation). I decided to keep quiet. I did not want to taint her choice, and after all, I had not seen the adult who had posted that election campaign advertisement, and nor had they shared with me the exact meaning of that billboard message. However, I should admit, I felt weird! I knew from the bottom of my heart that whoever had put it up, was not a Kerry fan.

A Look at the 2004 US Presidential Choice made by “Becky” in Middle School

On another day, I asked my 11-year-old daughter who attends a private middle school, who she would vote for at school during their mock US presidential elections. The answer I got from Becky was totally different from Polly. She answered: “Of course, Bush, I will vote for Bush”. Out of curiosity, I went on to ask why she would choose Bush. She retorted; “Do you want me to be booed at if I do not vote for Bush? Everyone in class is voting for Bush, and I will vote for Bush, and that’s the way it goes, period! If I vote for Kerry, I will get booed at, and I do not like to be booed at, especially if I am a minority in the class! No! No!” For some seconds, I was stunned. I could not believe what I was hearing. However, at the split of another second, I conferred to my mental storage map, dwelling on what Piaget stressed regarding 11 year olds, I recalled that Becky was in the concrete operational stage whose characteristics evolve on logical thinking, but at the same time limited to physical reality. What left me speechless was the fact that “peer-pressure”, the long dreaded fear that is nerve wrecking to all parents of preteens and adolescents, had come to my doorstep unnoticed as it was. That was a defining moment that left me with chills in my body, I just could not believe Becky’s choice would be determined by peer pressure. After a careful analysis, I conjured. “How could I not believe my ears, this was peer pressure at best?” I asked myself. From that day on, I understood how “peer-pressure” could be such a forceful, yet decisive element in pre-teens. Research studies indicate that peer judgments gain increasing importance among older children and adolescents. I therefore decided not to interfere with Becky’s decision, but to go with the flow of events. I decided to be neutral, and I positively reaffirmed her choice, and said to her, “Go for it girlfriend! Follow your heart!” She readily qualified my statement by making calculated shaky bodily movements that made her shoulders and hands sway repeatedly (the Michael Jackson dance rhythm way), and she simultaneously recited: “Go Bush! Go Bush! Go Bush! Wooooo!”

The Two Girls Participated in School Mock-Votes for 2004 US President:

When the voting dates for both of my daughters arrived, the talk at home was nothing but politics and the ensuing voting at their prospective schools. They cast their votes, and soon the nation cast their votes too, followed by counting, and announcing of the results.

Aftermath of the 2004 US Presidential Election Results

I went to pick up my six year old from school, and I had never seen a child so miserable. The moment she got into the car, she burst into tears, and followed erratic sobs. I drove to the side of the road, and asked what had happened to her at school, and why she was crying so badly. Polly's answer was; "I lost". I asked her, "What did you lose?" She answered; "My favorite choice Kerry, is not going to be president! Why, ma'am, why?" she sobbed bitterly and I could hear nothing from her except the "Hi-i! Hi-a! Hi'i! Hi-i!" crying noises from Polly. She sobbed, "I lost, and I am a loser. Why ma'am, why am I such a loser? I picked him, he is good, and why did I lose? Now Kerry lost, and I am a big loser in class, Hhhhhiiii-hhhhhiiii-hhhhhiiii" Polly cried the way the 2005 Tsumani victims cried at the loss of their beloved ones!

2004 US Presidential Election Results and Impact on the Kindergartener

The six year old was extremely miserable that day, and when we got home, she refused to eat, and went straight to her bedroom to cry as if there was a funeral. The experience was excruciating for the kindergartener. Fortunately, I had extensive experience on counseling young children who might be going through trauma, grieving, or any form of emotional loss. I had to apply all the human ecological, family and child development skills I acquired from my graduate school and over the years. I found myself compelled to applying all developmentally appropriate practices I could ever remember or imagine, practices enmeshed with play therapy, as well as heavy doses of emotional counseling for countless days that had to come. She would not eat properly, and most of the time, she would refuse to eat her favorite foods.

Polly's ordeal gave me the opportunity to counsel her using a variety of approaches to wellness and health. The models I found useful were as follows: 1) the psychological health model, 2) the person characteristics model, and 3) the person characteristics model. Each model provided me as counselor and therapist, the concepts that were helpful and applicable to the maintenance of my distraught kindergartener's sense of well-being, and ability to cope successfully with her grieving at the loss and trauma. I chose those three models from among many out there because of the reasons that follow.

The Psychological Health Model

This is a model that is applicable in scenarios that require coping with dilemmas that contaminate psychological health, and in this case self-esteem. Research indicates that criteria that apply significantly in the pursuit of the psychological health model are self-acceptance, self-knowledge, self-confidence and self-control, a clear perception of reality, courage and resilience, balance and moderation, love of others, love of life, and purpose in life (Kinnier 1997; Brems 2000; Campbell 2000; Schmidt 2002; and Skovholt 2001). In utilizing this approach, I discovered joy as well as a sense of exhilaration compounded with accomplishment that resulted from finding meaning and purpose for the maintenance of psychological health. I also found myself connecting to the experiences I had during my research on children traumatized by the deaths of their parents who died of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe (Chigubu, 2000). This model worked well in normalizing Polly's situation. On the other hand, I found myself utilizing the personal characteristics model for both of them, and the model in question offered affirmation.

The Personal Characteristics Model

The problem at hand became more and more complex each time we switched on the television to listen to the news. Becky, the preteen was overly jubilant because her candidate George Bush had won, while the kindergartener became extremely depressed because her candidate John Kerry had lost. When dealing with a jubilant, exuberant, and exalted preteen, one has to be extremely person-centered, careful, and cautious enough not to contaminate the high self-esteem that the preteen would be using as a source of their joy and happiness at that given time. Preteens are particularly sensitive about who they are, and often have unrealistic expectations. More often than not, self-esteem, or the value or sense of worth an individual places on his or her own characteristics, abilities, and behaviors, is affected by such expectations (McNergney & Herbert, 2000). We all know that from 6 to 12 years (the juvenile period), personal and emotional development turn outward as children enter the fourth stage of personal development – industry versus inferiority (Erikson, 1965). According to Erikson, during this stage, home remains an important base; nonetheless, neighborhood and classroom cliques (almost composed of all boys and girls) become major socializing agents (Erikson, 1968). Grounded on Erikson's school of thinking, I applied the related counseling approach to Becky's situation; the personal characteristics model which identifies accurate empathy, non-possessive warmth, positive regard, and genuineness as the "necessary and sufficient conditions" for therapeutic change (Rogers, 1957; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Further, as a parent, counselor and/or therapist, I chose to affirm, rather than discourage, demean, humiliate, oppose, criticize or judge my preteen. Why? It is important to note that parent, counselor, or therapist affirmation, which is the ability to communicate positive

regard, warmth, and acceptance to the client (in my case – my daughter), is also significantly “associated with positive therapeutic outcomes (Orlinsky & Howard, 1978). What I found encouraging with this model is that the characteristics of this model call for assertiveness, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, honesty, emotional presence, goal-directedness, and self-respect on the part of the counselor, parent, or therapist, all of which I addressed in my own comfort zone without getting overwhelmed, nor annoying my client - the preteen in question.

Finally, let us look at the third approach that I adopted and used holistically to empower the distressed Kindergartener whose self-esteem had been battered to rock bottom sea level, and at the same time as a parent to be able to positively affirm the jubilant pre-teen, whose sky-rocketing self-esteem had elevated her to cloud nine. I had to strike an analogous balance between picking up the broken pieces of sharp edged glass with one hand, and at the same time grasp an egg with a hand that had no fingers. Definitely, the psychological wellness of these two girls had been put in disequilibrium, and that alone was a threat to the girls’ health. In her quest to celebrate the winning election results, the preteen embarked on heavy eating sessions, which included any junk food she could set her hands. Simultaneously, the kindergartener completely refrained from eating. She had lost her appetite, and that raised a great deal of anxiety in me as the parent, child trauma therapist, and counselor for children with violated self-esteem. For this complex situation, I therefore chose a wellness and health holistic approach, which is as follows:

The Multidimensional Wellness and Health Model

According to Myers (1991), several different wellness models have been proposed for use by counselors and therapists. It is important to note that one of the most common approaches defines wellness holistically by considering it from mental, physical and spiritual aspects of functionality. On the other hand, other models describe dimensions such as job satisfaction (for instance, in my two daughters’ cases, they had been involved in voting which is synonymous to “job”), relationships, family life, nutrition, leisure time, physical fitness, mental alertness, and stress management (Ardell, 1988; Brems, 2000; & Chigubu, 2000). In addition, physical wellness is given more attention than other dimensions of wellness because physical illness cannot be easily ignored (Evans, 1997). Further, most systemic models of wellness, however, suggest that all the identified dimensions of health and wellness interact, and that they must all be evaluated in the process of assessing a person’s state of wellness (Skovholt, 2001). From my perspective as a concerned parent, I invited my children, traumatized and excited as they were, to engage themselves into six dimensions which include intellectual, social, occupational, spiritual, emotional, and physical components as proposed by researchers on wellness (Hettler, 1984; & Chigubu, 2000). Indeed, “with a holistic focus, wellness incorporates not just the whole person, but the whole person throughout the totality of the life span” (Myers, 1991, p. 185). In conclusion, it is

important to note that the holistic and multidimensional health as well as wellness model should be well understood by those undertaking the study of theories of counseling and psychotherapy. It is therefore imperative for the therapists and counselors for especially traumatized children.

My Reaction as a Parent & a Researcher on Self Esteem, and Trauma in Children

1. Maybe as adults, we must ask ourselves whether bringing politics to the classroom has outcomes that undermine or elevate the intended goals.
2. Maybe, let us leave no child behind by taking education to the political arena, instead of bringing politics into the educational settings
3. Do we really need to have young children go through the traumas and highs that presidential elections bring?
4. If yes, it would be a good idea to have heavy counseling sessions for the young children who will end up traumatized, stressed, and emotionally battered if their favorite candidate loses.
5. My daughter is lucky because I had the experience and skills of counseling young children whose self-esteem has been battered from previous encounters.

What Politics can do to Young Children's lives

I look back at the period when I grew up in the then Southern Rhodesia, then segregated Rhodesia and current Zimbabwe. I ask myself what happened to me when I was in the Piaget's (1954) preoperational stages (2 – 7 years) in terms of politics, and I remember very well the events that took place when I was 5, 6, and 7 years old, as well as what happened to me during Piaget's Concrete operational period (7 -11 years). This is a time when the late Joshua Nkomo, a founding veteran of the revolutionary politics in the then Rhodesia. I remember when he would come to our township hall, and as school children we would be groomed by our teachers to chant "Freedom! No Land, No Freedom! Viva Nkomo! Forward Father ZAPU! PUZA! Freedom Africa! Down with the Settlers, Down with the Settlers! Our Land, Back to Our People! Viva Father Nkomo! Down with Racism! Viva Nkomo!" Little did I know then that politics in young children could have devastating and long-lasting impact on children, and the after effects lives on throughout their lifespan. I say this because how I see the world today is shaped on the seeds of politics sown during the tender ages of growth. Today, when we look at what is going on in Zimbabwe in terms of land disputes, or "land grabs" as others choose to call it, or "land re-distribution", or land conflicts depending on which political orientation you are coming from, we might wonder why this is taking place. I strongly believe that this is all about the repercussions of bringing heavy doses of politics to young children when they are in their preoperational and concrete operational stages.

The late revolutionary and then Southern Rhodesian political black grandmother Mrs. Mbuya Nehanda (the woman whose school of thoughts were adopted by Robert Mugabe) the woman in the 1800's who was later on hanged by the British because of her political agenda to groom, politicize young school going children and youths to turn against the former British rule, to revolt and get the land back to blacks. Further, Joshua Nkomo, the father of the then Rhodesian revolutionary politics who also campaigned to get land from white commercial farmers and re-distribute to landless blacks, did so by bringing politics in the school arenas, villages, bus stations, or at various Chiefs Halls during weekends, places that would be packed with children, youths, families, and adults. When one looks in retrospect, one could argue that the after effects on children of those days from the political doses from some of Zimbabwe's late political and revolutionary leaders like Mrs. Nehanda were real, and the vestiges are conspicuous. Further, we have the late Joshua Nkomo's political nuances on "freedom from colonialism and getting land from British settlers back to the blacks" or the current president Robert Mugabe's dismantling of apartheid or laws promoting segregation and separate development based on race that he inherited when he came into power in 1980, could be seen by some as the consequent vestiges of the works started in the 1800's by the revolutionary Ms. Mbuya Nehanda, who is said to have chanted these words as she was hanged by the British: "You are killing me for our land. I will die, but my bones will rise" (2004 African Female Scholar, born Kenyan now holds Zimbabwean citizenship). There is a strong belief among 99% of Zimbabwean elderly people who firmly affirm the idea that president Robert Mugabe was led by the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda to become the first black prime minister and president of Zimbabwe, hence, he has a very strong support with especially the rural poor. It is further believed that Mbuya Nehanda's heavy political doses that president Robert Mugabe he was subjected to during his early childhood era, made him start his own political party called ZANU, and its ideologies are grounded in Nehanda's school of thought of bringing black Zimbabweans out of slavery. According to Ms. Mbuya Nehanda, "for as long as you are landless, you are a slave to poverty". Further, Nkomo revived Nehanda's political agenda. Sooner or later, Mugabe put into effect Nehanda and Nkomo's agenda of land redistribution to landless blacks who had long "expected" to have the "land as a symbol of freedom" from Robert Mugabe who had received heavy doses of politics relating to dismantling racism, discrimination, oppression, and freedom during the preoperational, operational concrete, and formal stages of child development.

Putting into effect Ms. Nehanda ideologies regarding giving land to landless blacks by president Mugabe is a stance that has manifest itself in Zimbabwe today. Unfortunately, putting Nehanda's school of thought into effect has occurred in a way that has caused extreme controversy both locally and internationally, and consequently, the whole nation is now experiencing extreme poverty due to international economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe. The dichotomy of the Zimbabwean case is that for those folk who received the heavy political doses prescribed by the highly politicized Mbuya Nehanda who vowed in the 1800's that killing her would not help because "his bones would rise", genuinely believe that it is the right thing to re-distribute the land, and on the other end of the rope, they are those who believe strongly that it was a good thing to hang Ms. Nehanda, and they do not condone what is going on right now, and they call it "land-grab". The conflict seems to deepen further for as long as the global society pays

no attention to the “implications of bringing heavy doses of political overtones” to growing children. There is a greater need to carry out further research and pay special attention to the “omnipresent phenomenon” which I have seen blossom in both the Zimbabwean case and the US study I carried on during the 2004 presidential elections.

A Close Look on Research and the Omnipresent Phenomenon

Research indicates that “expectations” are an omnipresent phenomenon in learning environments exposed to political endeavors, and the youth’s or child’s expectancy effect can be viewed as a special case of a broader concept known as the self-fulfilling prophecy, in which a person’s expectation is capable of bringing about an outcome (Synder, 1974). Bearing this notion in mind, today we find Zimbabwe’s landless black families and war veterans demanding land which they say belonged to their ancestors of the 1800’s, a claim that could be frowned at with disdain by some, and yet so equally embraced with jubilation by others in Zimbabwe, depending on what political orientation one received during the early years of child development. Based on Zimbabwe’s case study which included the heavy doses of the late Mbuya Nehanda, a black political woman who was well known in the then Southern Rhodesia to teach political overtones on how to get the land back from British settlers of the 1800’s (a problem that still exists in Zimbabwe today), to youths and children in the preoperational and concrete operational stages of child development, and the study I carried out in the US on my two children regarding the involvement of young children in the 2004 US Presidential Elections, I would argue and conclude that politics should be well planned for if it has to be brought into the institutions of early learning.

A Look at Cross-Cultural Research on Child Development

Based on the research that was done by Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) which looked at cognitive development in the preschool years and concluded that the United States lags behind globally when measured against other industrialized nations on its national policy on preschool education, I would strongly encourage the education policy-decision makers to re-think the issue of bringing politics regarding involving children’s participation in US presidential elections. The argument that I bring forward is that the school should be a positive, safe, and non-threatening learning environment that fosters developmentally appropriate practices that promote a positive self-esteem to the learner. The two scenarios of the episodes in Zimbabwe and classroom presidential elections in the US could be evidence enough to encourage all adults concerned to de-construct old ideas and provide a true picture of what politics can do to child development. I am sure if

I were to be in Zimbabwe today, I would be part and parcel of the so-called “land grab thugs” as what some choose to call them. I know I would be one of those in line to demand for land, because this is politics that was enchanted to me as part of growing up: “freedom!” The politicians who sow those “freedom” slogans like: “Freedom! You are an African slave until you own land, freedom, viva freedom!” did it with such vibrant energies that would stick in one’s medulla oblongata for life.

Dissecting Politics and Child Development

What point am I trying to bring across here? I am of the idea that as adults, we might need to ask ourselves what indeed politics can do to the growing children when they participate in the politics of voting during US presidential elections. If adults lose the elections, we can always say to ourselves: “Get over it! Move on! Get a life! Get out of town! Let’s apply economic sanctions on that country until poverty brings them down to their knees! Let us ostracize that country and so on!” Sadly, the story is very different when we involve politics with growing young children whose minds absorb every detail like a sponge, and store all the dirt that comes along with politics. The children might not show any signs of depression but before long, we should not be surprised at the amount of violence, depression, mental illness, suicide, teenage pregnancies and all social ills that will manifest. The vestiges of politics are not anything to take lightly. What happens to the minds of the young child today in terms of politics, might affect their lives forever.

In terms of my kindergartener, the 2004 US presidential elections devastated her self esteem, her views about politics, she hated to go to school, and was very depressed. Research studies indicate that low self-esteem can translate into other problems, and has been implicated in depression, suicide, anorexia nervosa, delinquency, and other adjustment problems (DuBois, Felner, & Brand, 1997, Frenzel, 1994; Harter & Marold, 1992; Chigubu, 2000).

Conclusions

One of the conclusions I have drawn from this study on the impact of heavy doses of politics on children, is that history at times does unfairly limit us to look deep down in retrospect and allow ourselves to re-visit the roots of the past that could cause the problems of today. Such denial might lead to blaming of the victim, scapegoat tactics, oppression of the weaker species, isolation, ostracizing the defenseless, marginalizing the poor and the weak, starving the poor, turning a blind eye to emergencies that call for humanitarian assistance, witness violence in schools, bullying among school going children, homicides, witness astronomic numbers of “teenage suicide”, drug abuse, youths resenting or losing “trust” for adults, witness high numbers of jail inmates, school dropouts, and the list goes on and on.

Food for Thought

As an African international scholar looking on and keying in, I sincerely hope that this article will be an eye-opener to the global village, based on the African proverb which says: "It takes the whole village to raise a child". I hope this article will incite future researchers to carry out longitudinal studies on children subjected to heavy doses of political endeavors. I sincerely hope in the future, properly trained therapists and counselors specially trained to handle child trauma, child grief and loss, child depression, and child stigma would be readily available in each and every classroom to assist children who will fall in the category of my kindergartner who saw herself as a "political loser", and so "politically heart-broken to a point where up to now, she shows signs of depression if she sees senator John Kerry on television. There is dire need to counsel those children who choose a candidate that will not win in the presidential elections, like Polly who had to go through untold post-trauma guilt disorder syndrome. I also hope educators and school authorities will think seriously about include programs that are sensitive to "good mental health" in children, teachers, and parents, because the intention is to attempt to leave no child behind especially with the high rise on teenage suicide in the US (Pauley, 2005). Perhaps there is need to take heed to the famous words of wisdom on closure to the 2004 US Presidential election campaign, and commenting on the victory of his son George Bush as well as on the loss of senator John Kerry, when Sr. George Bush stated: "Politics is not the end of the world, we must learn to move on, because at the end of the day, there is always a life to get back to!" (US News Channel: CNN 2004). These therapeutic exit words from the former US president are rich and consoling to adults. However, to the politically charged or politically battered child that would be in the Piaget's preoperational, concrete operational, or formal stages, the heavy doses of politics should be accompanied with the nurturing "after-elections" counseling and therapy necessary in human development across the life span.

There is hope, especially when the president George Bush indicated during his inaugural speech "There is hope for every child in America, hope to get the promise of America, and promise to walk into liberty" (January 2005). All in all, there is hope for every global child if as adults, we could try a new avenue of democracy; which is to bring education into the political and let children enjoy play, and abstain from the adults' heavy doses of political "social referencing". What I saw in my kindergartner self-pity, anger, depression, loss of appetite, dislike of going back to school, lack of trust in adults and the television, hatred of that billboard which had a poodle, confusion, nightmares, she would wake up and cry at night, and it was an ordeal to bring sense into her. If senator Kerry appeared on TV, the vicious cycle of signs of anger and loss would surface. This experience led me to sit down and write this article, and this ethnographic study, anchored in phenomenology will entice empirical researchers to come!

How can educators prepare themselves for future challenges?

If good professionalism is seen as perceiving problems and opportunities, then so be it! There is much to be learned from our professional forebears, by acknowledging that sometimes the very intellectual tools that have proved useful at one time in any given place, could be inappropriate for another time and another place. This study should help us demystify and demythologize those notions that no longer work in the present hour. Further, there is need for us all to stop to smell the coffee, invent and re-discover new ways of thinking and behaving. In all essence, most errors we commit either in church, at home, at school, professionally or politically, are missed opportunities for learning encounters which need re-visiting by us all!

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