

It Takes a *Whole Child* to Raise of Village® ♥

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Change the Story – Transform the Future

In his book “Change the Story, Change the Future,” (2015) David Korten writes: “When we get our story wrong, we get our future wrong,” (p.1). If the children are indeed our future than the stories about how we educate and help them come of age are the most important stories to get right. Our present reality is the future produced by yesterday’s stories of how we educated and helped our children come of age.

I wrote in [Change the Story, Transform the Future](#) (2014): “Rite of passage stories can weave together elements of the sacred in secular forms that convey values and ethics essential to the survival of the Earth, all our relations and ourselves. Children are a product of their thoughts and dreams. What they hear and see they remember and become. The stories our children hear today will fuel their dreams for tomorrow. Children are our dreams for the future. How we raise our children will determine the future.”

What do you think the story was behind the proverb “It takes a whole village to raise a child”? What was the whole village doing to raise their children? There is an abundance of literature to strongly suggest that rites of passage were probably what a whole village was doing to collectively raise their children. Rites of passage were their shared story.

What do we mean by “rites of passage”? For many, the concept of rites of passage may have been influenced by media headlines like: “Bullying Is Not a Rite of Passage”¹ - “Teens and Drugs: Rite of Passage or Recipe for Addiction?”² “Rethinking Rites of Passage: Substance Abuse on America’s Campuses”³ “Righting in Panama: The Implications; War: Bush’s Presidential Rite of Passage”⁴.

Rites of passage have been associated with mysterious, secret acts undertaken by drunken college students, gangs, secret societies, or other groups to welcome or “initiate” a member. These rites are focused on the individual and are related to their perceptions of being included or excluded from a group.

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1 CNN October 14, 2011

2 Time Magazine, June 29 2011

3 Commission on Substance Abuse at Colleges and University 1994

4 N.Y. Times, Apple Jr. December 21 1989

But there is another side to the story. Before rites of passage were ever construed as initiation of individuals, they were, in fact, community-organizing processes that villages engaged in for the purpose of community resiliency, adaptation and survival. After all, community survival is contingent on children knowing and committing themselves to the values and practices that have allowed their village to exist across multiple generations. So when we say, “it takes a whole village to raise a child”, I invite you to consider that it means it is the essential responsibility of the village to educate the young in the community lore that will allow successful continuity into the future.

That is why we say, “It takes a whole child to raise a village”:

- Collectively raising children strengthens community connections and social capital.
- Planning for our children focuses attention on future generations and the long-term consequences of our values and actions.

Raising children in ways that ensure the survival of our species for generations into the future is our most important work. We knew this eons ago and therefore did not simply leave it in the hands of individual parents and hope for the best. Instructing children through a rite of passage uses meaningful rituals that reinforce the shared values and beliefs of a community. This strengthens the community’s resiliency and ability to adapt and renew its commitment to life-affirming values and behaviors.

“When we get our story RITE we get our future right. Indeed, rites of passage have always been our shared story of community survival. Rites of passage are the next best story that already was. But this is a story we as a society seem to be forgetting. For over forty-five years I have explored and put into practice this story of rites of passage as a community-organizing process that acknowledges and exploits the reciprocity between the individual and community. I have called this ecological process “youth and community development through rites of passage.” This story includes guiding principles for organizing groups in ways that strengthen their commitment to collaborate in order to mutually solve problems and raise their children. It is a unifying story, built on a vision of hope rather than fear that can emerge from the creative imagination of a community and offer a bridge between western science and traditional wisdom.

The celebration of a rite of passage is renewing for the entire community, which includes earth and all our relations. A child's public expression of and commitment to a community's values and beliefs reinforces expectations for behaviors for the survival of the entire community and health and wellbeing of all our relations. A child's coming of age presents an opportunity for the whole community to examine, adapt and re-commit themselves to their social and cultural heritage. In this light *it takes a whole child to raise a village*.

Coming of Age the *RITE* Way:
Youth & Community Development through Rites of Passage:

There is a dearth of contemporary, community-based, and impacting transition experiences for children. For millennia, civilizations throughout the world helped children move to adulthood via rites of passage. In the absence of community-oriented and sanctioned rites of passage, young people revert to driving, drinking, smoking, use of drugs, and involvement in gangs to mark for themselves and their peer group their entry into adulthood.

One of the most frequently sought after and elusive human conditions is a "psychological sense of community." Humans have congregated in groups for survival and propagation since the dawn of our existence. This biological imperative exists in the midst of a long history of human associations fraught with conflict and instability. There may be no greater impact in the lessening or loss of the sense of community than on the development of children.

Youth & community development through rites of passage integrates concepts of rites of passage and sense of community synthesized from literature and life and practice in diverse setting and cultures over forty years. It focuses on the interdependent and reciprocal relationship between rites of passage and sense of community that dramatically impacts the development of children and the future of society and our world. Without a sense of community, you cannot have viable rites of passage. Concomitantly, the development of a sense of community is inextricably linked to community rituals like rites of passage. Rites of passage can be used as a community organizing framework and a viable method for linking education and youth development approaches within a unifying story that promotes positive youth development and strengthens community resiliency and adaptation to survive and thrive.

What We Believe:

We believe that rites of passage are universal and emerge in relationship to and informed by culture, context, Spirit and the natural places in which people are born and/or live.

We believe that all things are related and the little things are so big.

We believe that children are like a big radar dish receiving more information than we can imagine. Everything we do and say has an impact.

We believe that everything people need to know about rearing children, rites of passage and strengthening a sense of community they already know. As "thought partners" we help people remember.

We believe that a community's rite of passage story emerges through civic engagement that builds "social capital," which is what results when people work together to resolve common issues.

We believe that authentic partnerships, forged from trust, mutual respect and honoring diversity across an array of individuals and institutions can support the conditions for principles to inform and guide the emergence of integrated design strategies across the traditional spectrum of service delivery:

Prevention & Health Promotion –
Identification & Intervention –
Therapy & Treatment -
After-care and ongoing maintenance

*Language is Consciousness
All things are related
Change the Story – Transform the Future*

We believe that something needs to happen around the time of puberty for children and their parents that honor and respects nature's signal for a process of coming of age through initiation and rites of passage to commence.

Threads in a Tapestry



Like threads in a tapestry language weaves a common story that links techniques for clinical practice in prevention with identification, treatment and maintenance. When professionals and citizens, youth and adults join together in learning the language of

initiation and rites of passage and participate in experiential encounters with the initiatory process they increase their understanding of youth and community development through rites of passage. Then they can collectively use this common language and shared techniques to improve interventions and therapy with adolescents and their families and integrate many different approaches, such as; [developmental assets](#), character education, [asset-based community development](#), social development model of youth development, [academic and social-emotional learning](#), resiliency, Communities that Care, [Charter for Compassionate](#).

What follows are some of the components integrated for a community-oriented rite of passage. Each component is linked to a foundational rite of passage experience that commences around the time of puberty and/or the transition from primary to secondary around the age of 10 – 12. The details of each component are included in publications, referenced at the end and based on experiences accumulated over forty years.

The Rite Of Passage Experience[®] ROPE[®] is used as an exemplar of the application of the twenty elements in the architectural structure for youth & community development through rites of passage. It is **both an organizing process and a series of design principles** that inform and guide the creation of each setting's rite of passage. It is **only one way** that the twenty elements were integrated into a community-oriented rite of passage. The twenty elements are designed to help each group and community formulate their own unique rite of passage experience. Together through conversations within community you will find the ***RITE* WAY!**

“ROPE gives us something to hold onto
during this difficult time of parenting adolescents.
It gives us a common language
to speak with our children and other parents.”

Richard Keene – 1983
Killed in the World Trade Center 9/11/2001
Parent of five children who came of age through ROPE[®]

From Theory to Policy to Practice A Shared Story and Common Language

Emergent design - A community's rite of passage story emerges through civic engagement that builds “social capital,” which is what results when people work together to resolve common issues. It engages people in conversations and experiences for exploring the process of initiation

and harvests their collective wisdom through an intentional community organizing process that results in their own rite of passage experience⁵.

Something Happens - By targeting children, their parents, and families in the transition grades between primary and secondary school they are engaged in a common Story through a strategy known as the Rite Of Passage Experience[©] ROPE[®]. It is the foundation story – with a common language that *ties all of a community's resources together* and puts the theory of youth and community development through rites of passage into practice⁶.

Intentional design as if all things are related - The ROPE[®] strategy is designed as a bridge between the traditional paradigm of “professional service delivery” to one that builds compassionate citizens & communities that remember rites of passage. “The Rite of Passage Experience[©] ROPE[®] Guide for Promoting Youth & Community Maturation & Health” is in the form of a “curriculum.” In reality it is a practice guide that includes principles for *organizing a community for a change* and design strategies to enact adaptive change that nurtures all life⁷.

It's not about a generation gap – It's about the absence of rites of passage – This whole system's approach has a number of carefully designed strategies (programs) that focus on specific populations, such as: parents, children, community organizations, education, etc., with unique developmental challenges – i.e. *collision of transition* to focus on parent's entry into mid-life and release of their children and opportunities to affirm, honor and celebrate significant milestones in people's lives. While the design strategies, i.e. “programs” target specific populations with unique challenges our orientation focuses interventions to integrate and link all of the challenges and people within a *whole living system where all things are related*⁸.

ROPE[®] for children – It is the ***Call to Attention & Action***. Community-oriented rites of passage like ROPE[®] offers an adaptive set of strategies designed to prepare children to enter adolescents and their parents and families to make a place for their child's emerging adulthood within a community's story of rites of passage. It is the community's acknowledgement that a process of initiation and rites of passage is commencing. Children engage in transformative experiences, which unveil their authentic self in loving relationship to nature and others that helps forge a

5 Blumenkrantz, D.G. Coming of Age the RITE Way: Youth & Community Development through Rites of Passage. Oxford University Press (In press) 2016.

6 Blumenkrantz, D.G. & Goldstein, M. Rites of passage as a framework for community interventions with youth. Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice Vol. 1 (2), (2010). Online: <http://www.gjcopp.org/en/article.php?issue=3&article=10>

7 Scheer, Scott D., Gavazzi, Stephen M., and David G. Blumenkrantz. Rites of passage during adolescence. The Forum for Family and Consumer Issues, 12 (2), (2007).Online: <http://ncsu.edu/ffci/publications/2007/v12n2-2007-fall/index-v12n2-nov-2007.php>

8 Blumenkrantz, D.G. Rite of passage experience, ROPE[®]: Guide for promoting youth & community maturation & health. Hummingbird Press @ the Center. (Editions:1981, 1998, 2010, 2015).

strong identity with ethics for compassion, civility, civic engagement and deepening connection to nature and a sacred Earth⁹.

ROPE® for parents – It is aligned with their children’s Rite Of Passage Experience, ROPE® introduces a common language based in emotional experiences - builds parent coalitions that serve as small villages of support to mentor each other’s children and meet the challenges of mid-life transition and releasing their children. Parents learn to become fluent in a common language to raise their children together.

Initiation of Scholars® - A component of ROPE® that impacts academic achievement while creating a climate of caring, civility, compassion and respect throughout the education community¹⁰.

Finding Your Bliss: Second phase of the ROPE® *story* views *play as secular spirituality* – connecting all middle school students with positive leisure time activities as a central expectation (“common core”) for the development of the whole child. “If you help a child find their ‘bliss’ it’s the best protective factor against all adolescent problems.” Finding their “bliss” an outlet for their creativity opens an inlet to their true value and identity. Play is a pathway for re-creating an authentic self that is resilient an able to adapt to a changing world in ways that nurture themselves and all life¹¹.

Therapy as Initiation: When a community adopts a story of rites of passage in their education and youth development policy a technique for identifying and intervening with adolescence and their families is available should problems develop. The technique builds on the language & lessons of student’s Rite Of Passage Experience, which reframes problems and therapy into the

9 Blumenkrantz, D.G. and Gavazzi, S.M., Guiding transitional events for children and adolescents through a modern day rite of passage. Journal of Primary Prevention, Vol. 13 (3), (1993).

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language of rites of passage and gives youth the skills and techniques to be fully engaged partners in co-researching and resolving this *ordeal in the initiatory process*¹².

Service to others and the community is established as an expectation for all youth as part of the 3rd phase of a community's ROPE® story. It serves as a measure of children's maturity and advancement through adolescence and into adulthood¹³.

College as a place of initiation – Establishes regional Institutes for the Advancement and Study of Youth and Community Development through Rites of Passage. Provides orientation framework for everyone in the college community – (i.e., First Year Experience). College students engage in systematic study, experiences and practicums within surrounding communities in their efforts to help rites of passage *emerge* in communities¹⁴.

Finding your authentic spiritual self Coming of age within a community “Story” of initiation honors the central developmental task of adolescents - finding identity, meaning and purpose and a search for their authentic spiritual self. Rites of passage are the public unification of secular and spiritual practices that affirm an individual's transition while creating the conditions for an emerging adult to feel a sense of connection with their community, culture, nature and self. In reciprocity it strengthens the bonds between people in a community in ways that serve survival¹⁵.

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These resources are available by contacting thecenter@rope.org

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You can Learn More about and Take Action to bring rites of passage to your family and community. You're not alone. For more information and to be in conversation about how you can “Change the Story & Transform the Future visit us: <http://rope.org/learn-more/>.