



Applying Kwanzaa Principles to Education: Ujima

By Educator Barnes – December 28, 2021

Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to January 1. According to the book “The Seven Days of Kwanzaa” by Angela Shelf Medearis, “In 1966, Dr. Karenga created Kwanzaa, a cultural holiday based upon the ancient customs of Africa ... Dr. Karenga hoped that the things that were studied and practiced during Kwanzaa would guide African-Americans all year long.” Each day of Kwanzaa covers one of the seven Kwanzaa principles. On each day of Kwanzaa, Indy K12 will explore how these principles can be applied to education.

Ujima is the Kwanzaa principle of collective work and responsibility. It is the notion that we should work together to solve our problems and other people's problems. In education, this is hard. It is hard to help others when you do not agree with them, or you do not understand their stance. One way we can do this is to not bring harm to others. There is a fine line between constructive criticism and seeking annihilation. We can disagree and still choose peace.

This also means not turning our back on others just because we have gotten ahead or gotten ours. How many times have we heard a teacher say, "Already got my education." This statement normally comes after difficulty with students. Although this is true. There is a difference between saying this and living out these words. Teachers live out these words when they are unwilling to help and push students to excellence even though they are difficult to deal with. Teachers must keep the big picture in mind. If they give up on students now, they might not become the type of citizens that will be productive in society.

Collective work and responsibility are also important for administrators to remember. Firing teachers, especially during a teacher shortage, might not be the best solution. More administrators need to take responsibility for getting teachers to the level they need them to be instead of giving the teachers the boot. I am not saying there are situations that do not warrant firing. I am saying that all administrators should realize that even if teachers interview well they may still have skill gaps, so administrators should be responsible for growing their staff. If they do not know how to do this, they should work collectively with other administrators to learn how.

Ujima requires us to think of others and not be self-centered. In the movie "Soul Food," the mother said, "one finger pointing the blame don't make no impact but you ball up all them fingers into a mighty fist and you can strike a mighty blow." It is easy to blame others for their shortcomings; it is harder to help them so the education system as a whole is better. When we all think of others while working together, we can be a powerful force.