Contemplative Inquiry, Indwelling, and the Art of Understanding the Child

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Abstract

Descriptive Inquiry is a contemplative approach to child study intended to help teachers overcome bias and habitual thinking, become more mindful of the basis of their professional judgments, and develop a moral framework that might help them resist dehumanizing and ineffective policies and imposed practices. The paper draws upon a number of distinct but overlapping areas in the literature on teaching: teacher inquiry, reflective practice, spirituality and education, and contemplative practice. The author has taught the process of Descriptive Inquiry in very different settings; in an urban education program in New York City designed to prepare public school teachers and in a new global program designed to prepare teachers in holistic, "Neohumanist" schools. The Neohumanist educational model is a synthesis of spirituality, critical pedagogy, and decolonization that includes practices derived from the Eight-fold Path of Aṣṭáunga Yoga. At the heart of the Neohumanist teacher preparation program is the Descriptive Inquiry process, designed to help educators develop their powers of educational observation, description, reflection, and intuition to better guide young people on their unique educational journeys. The paper features a narrative of practice by a Yogic nun, a teacher/school director who carried out her study in a school/children's home on the Thai/Myanmar border that serves refugee, homeless, and abandoned children.

Keywords: *contemplative practices, teacher inquiry, Neohumanist educational model , spirituality, holistic*

> Teachers cannot be said to understand children simply because they possess a considerable amount of explicit knowledge about them. Understanding is a deeper concept. It demands a sort of indwelling in the other, a touching of the sources of the other...(it) provides for relating, for being fully there in the presence and as a presence to the other. (Macdonald, 1995, p. 95)

Late in his career, James Macdonald, a revered curriculum theorist, challenged the conventional set of paradigms of the field (which he listed as the Romantic, the Cultural Transmission, the Developmental and the Radical) claiming that they were useful, but only partial accounts of what it means to be human and how we come to know the world. Drawing on the ideas of such diverse 20th century thinkers as Michael Polyani, Carl Jung, William James, Mary Caroline Richards, and others, he proposed a *dual dialectic* that would expand the individual/social dialectic into the deeper reaches of the self variously termed the unconscious, the Void, the Ground of Being, or in the religious sense, God. He called this dual dialectic a "transcendental/developmental paradigm," and thus opened the field of curriculum studies to a larger discussion of spirituality, values and human purposes.

Alongside this interest in the academic field, holistic education, with its ancient roots, developed as a contemporary field of practice focused on cultivating dimensions of human experience largely ignored by modern schooling with its priorities of learning facts, mastering the basics (reading, writing, and math) and doing well on exams. Influenced by various academic movements including humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, systems theory, holism, ecology, and the "new sciences" of complexity and quantum theory, holistic education aimed to cultivate the subtle human faculties of aesthetics, intuition, imagination, emotional intelligence, and spirituality, as well as a progressive social and ecological sense of responsibility. While small impacts on conventional schooling can be seen in such pedagogical innovations as social-emotional learning, restorative justice, environmental education, and various measures to make schooling more equitable, schooling remains stuck in a conventional mold that dates back to the beginning of the 20th century.

Despite decades of educational research, hundreds of "models of best practices," and an industry of "research-based programs" and "data-driven instruction," genuinely effective teaching and learning remain a mystery, frustrating all efforts to identify the "one best method" or the most successful recipe for instruction. While much effort has gone into trying to articulate a *science* of teaching and reduce it to a list of prescribed behaviors, teaching is more an *art* than a science. It is a complex human activity with innumerable variables. Every context is different. Every child is unique. And every society holds different values about what is important and what should be taught. Educators concerned with the holistic development of the child needs to be aware of all these differences and nuances and approach their work with the same creative and contemplative purposes and intentions as a painter approaches a canvas or a poet considers the rhythm and imagery of her words.

In his book, *The Contemplative Practitioner* (1994/2013), John Miller quotes Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman (2011): "Wisdom (prajna) is not accumulated instrumental knowledge, but is rather a special kind of super-knowing, a knowing by becoming the known, by transcending the subject/object duality" (p. 27). This "knowing by becoming the known" ...the transcendence of the "subject/object duality" is a key feature of Macdonald's "indwelling," but it is undertheorized in terms of the processes and practices that might guide us there.

Child study has long been an important component of professional teaching, perhaps first systemized in a publication produced by the

Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation under the auspices of Teachers College, Columbia University (Almy, 1959). Since the mid-20th century, teachers have engaged in child study through careful observation for several reasons: to assess academic progress, to better understand behavioral issues, to learn more about individual/group relations, to better understand participation, or to determine the worth of particular teaching and learning techniques. Written data serves to distance the teacher from their perceptions, in order to more effectively analyze what they observe. Based on what they see, hear, feel, and know from past experience, they can make inferences that can guide the improvement of teaching. Most child study procedures relied heavily on the new (at the time) science of child development. In fact, Millie Almy, who wrote the primary text on child study referenced above, is also credited with shaping the emergent field of child development.

Child development, at first associated largely with the ideas of Jean Piaget, emerged as a discipline in the early 20th century, influenced strongly by theories of evolution and modernist ideas of progress. Theories of child development and how children learn can provide useful signposts in our efforts to help young people on their educational journey, but they don't get us to the deep knowing, what Macdonald termed "indwelling," necessary to truly guide the child. Most child studies, as currently carried out in schools, consists of the observer, with the stated aim of objectivity, their normative frameworks, their checklists, and the observed, known primarily by the myriad labels and numbers that classify and sort them. How, then, might we study children without the aim of monitoring, ranking, judging, and controlling them, but in the service of knowing them deeply, in order to more effectively guide them on their educational journey?

Descriptive Inquiry

A quote by Patricia Carini, who with her colleagues at the Prospect School in Vermont (1965-1991) developed the process of child study known as the Descriptive Review, highlights the importance of *seeing clearly*, in order not to fall into a form of habitual perception, thinking, and action:

> The gift of vision . . . through which observing lays claim to its fullest possibilities, requires exercise to realize its power or it relapses into a kind of blindness, in which the things in the world are perceived only as objects-of-use; that is, in terms of personal needs. In its most benign form, habituated perception is reassuring and indeed useful…But, there are limitations and implicit dangers in habituated perception… the world may come to be seen only from the frame of reference of personal need. **Then both the viewer and viewed are impoverished, detachment replaces interest, and the world loses its power for calling forth meaning.** (1979, p. 11)

Descriptive inquiry is a form of phenomenological inquiry designed to disrupt habitual thinking patterns, thus enabling practitioners to see more clearly aspects of their teaching practice. In this approach, learning to suspend judgment, bias, conditioned responses, and hasty interpretation allows for more fluid and open perception, guiding

the practitioner into forms of inquiry akin to Polyani's tacit knowing (1958, 1966), Schon's reflection-in-action (1984), and Miller's contemplative practice (1994/2013). The cultivation of such a disciplined perception works to broaden the range of pedagogical actions and responses and allows for deeper layers of meaning to emerge from classroom events. I suggest here that it is a form of inquiry extraordinarily well suited to developing a contemplative teaching practice – a meditative approach, not in the sense of meditation that is connected to a particular religion or spirituality, but in the sense of *an active attunement to the many layers of meaning in unfolding events.* Such an attunement is essentially a practice guided by "spirit," and I use the term spirit here in a broad, secular sense, hearkening to Huebner's notion that to

> "have spirit" is to be in touch with forces or aspects of life that make possible something new and give hope and expectations. Spirit refers to the possible and the unimagined—to the possibility of new ways, new knowledge, new relationships, new awareness. (in Hillis, 1999, pp. 343-344)

To be open to what is not yet imagined, however, requires the deconstruction of habitual patterns of perception and action, allowing for more fluid and open perception. Such disciplined perception, the exercise of the "gift of vision," offers the opportunity to attend to the multidimensionality of the child. Connecting the acts of systematic observation and description to phenomenological reflection on both inner and outer events makes this sort of clear seeing possible, providing the ground from which teachers can develop increasing insight and understanding about children and make informed moral judgments about what is in the best interest of their students. Descriptive inquiry is a meditation on the mystery of the child and their uniqueness and potential.

The Process

If the usual approach to child study is the observation and analysis of objective phenomena, then phenomenology expands this to include a systematic reflection on the subjective as well (the contents of the observer's consciousness such as emotions, judgments, and perceptions). Phenomenological educational inquiry focuses on the perception of both external and internal phenomena, and the detailed description of those perceptions. Description is the core methodology of this inquiry process – it is through taking a descriptive stance that inquirers using this method engage in a form of contemplative observation, seeing "what is" rather than seeing what our experiences have conditioned us to see. Another quotation from Carini:

> Describing I pause, and pausing, attend. Describing requires that I stand back and consider. Describing requires that I not rush to judgment or conclude before I have looked. Describing makes room for something to fully present. Describing is slow, particular work. I have to set aside familiar categories for classifying or generalizing. I have to stay with the subject of my attention. I have to give it time to speak, to show itself. (2001, p. 163)

As this passage suggests, engaging mindfully in description requires several things of the investigator. One is positioning herself on the borders of her taken for granted reality in order to become aware of her own perceptions and preconceived notions about those perceptions and to work to meet the thing described on its own terms. Another is resisting (or being aware of and stepping aside from) definitive judgments and instead remaining open to further experiences that generate possibilities and new understandings. A third is recognizing that moving from the particular to the general does not mean making an abstract generalization, but instead means seeing connections between different particulars that enables a deeper, more nuanced understanding. In simple language, descriptive inquiry requires the teacher to:

- Slow down
- Be attentive
- Be focused
- Look and listen carefully

Descriptive inquiry is a habit of mind, a way of learning to see more deeply into the uniqueness of each child, a way to look closely at student work in order to better understand the child and their growth patterns, and a way to examine one's own practice. When a teacher engages in inquiry, they become a *knowledge maker* rather than merely someone who implements the ideas of others. Inquiry is a creative foundation for becoming a teacher, for learning to really *see* our students – their needs, interests, strengths, characters, and interactions – more clearly. Teachers who practice this form of inquiry talk about making the child *visible*, seeing past the labels and numbers to the human *being*. This enables the making of judgments about curriculum, instruction, activities, materials, and interpersonal responses that are more thoughtful, more appropriate, fairer, and more effective.

There are a number of different formats for engaging in descriptive inquiry: one can observe and describe a specific child, a group interaction, student work (writing, drawing, constructing), or a teaching practice (for example, integrating movement with literacy, taking nature walks, or using visualization in mathematics). The most common starting point is the classic Descriptive Review of a Child, which encompasses five dimensions of the person: Physical Presence and Gesture, Disposition and Temperament, Relationships and Connections, Strong Interests and Preferences, and Modes of Thinking and Learning.

I was fortunate to work for sixteen years (2002-2018) in the School of Education at LIU-Brooklyn, under the leadership of Dean Cecelia Traugh, who was instrumental in bringing descriptive inquiry to generations of public-school teachers. Dr. Traugh and her colleagues at LIU had designed a unique urban teacher preparation program with descriptive inquiry at its core. I taught all levels of the course every year – the Descriptive Review of the Child, the Descriptive Review of a Teaching Practice, the Descriptive Review of Student Work. The majority of our students were public school teachers in Brooklyn neighborhoods in high intensity urban schools under the oppressive thumb of layers and layers of NYCDOE bureaucracy. Given the constraints and strictures of these city schools, it was quite amazing that they were able to engage in mindful practices at all, but many did and experienced important revelations about the possibilities of education in the process. We had a conference at the end of every academic year where students presented their reviews, and every year I

facilitated the group process by which peers learned from each other about the art of descriptive inquiry.

Neohumanist Education

After my formal retirement from LIU in 2018, I was asked to undertake a systematic review of and suggested revisions to, an independent system of schools under the auspices of Ananda Marga Gurukula, an international educational network of schools and institutes engaged in teaching, research, and service. These hundreds of schools, some of them in Western industrialized countries, and others in poor villages, refugee camps, and children's homes, had been engaged since the 1980's in establishing schools designed on the philosophy of "Neohumanism," a socio-spiritual theory articulated by Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1921-1990) – Indian philosopher, guru, social reformer, linguist, author, and composer—in *The Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism* (1982). In this book, Sarkar reconceptualized the centuries-old philosophy of Humanism, challenging the classic model of the isolated individual, the "I" as a bounded entity, surrounded by stable substances and objects in space that constitute separate "others" to manipulate, utilize, and transact with. Neohumanism recognizes that this sense of separation, mastery, and control in concert with an economic system predicated on resource extraction, endless growth, and needless consumption has led us to the ecological tipping point at which we find ourselves. Neohumanism requires the cultivation of an ontology that is **relational**, that understands there is no separation of self and other, of knower and known, of subject and object, but rather endless flows of being and becoming in which we are deeply entangled with everything in creation, visible and invisible, material and molecular, objective and subjective. This exquisitely subtle form of understanding, the elimination of the subject/object dichotomy, is "the diamond that cuts through illusion" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2006), and is the basis for becoming *with* the world, rather than *apart* from it. Neohumanist education is grounded in contemplative practices influenced by the ancient Indic system of Aṣṭáunga Yoga, and in its early days drew upon pedagogical ideas and practices from a variety of alternative models (Waldorf, Montessori, Deweyan progressive schools, etc.). It is currently engaged in the process of carving out a unique identity in the constellation of holistic models, one which is almost seamlessly aligned with the visionary document on the future of education in a report commissioned by UNESCO (see CWRC, 2020), which talks boldly about the need for a new Humanism. The expansion of love for all created beings and the act of service to human and non-human others is at the center of Neohumanist educational theory. This reconceptualization of what it means to be human and the learning of how to deepen and extend our relationships with each other and with all creatures, and of learning to live in life-sustaining and planet sustaining ways – this is the evolutionary task to which Neohumanist education is profoundly well-suited (Kesson, 2020).

I had undertaken a similar project in the 1990's, when I was asked to review the curriculum of Krishnamurti schools and suggest revisions that might bring the curriculum more in line with Jiddu Krishnamurti's philosophy (2001). The challenge faced by the Krishnamurti schools was how to have a holistic, interdisciplinary, well integrated high school curriculum and also meet the requirements of preparing students for the high school exams, which at that time (in the British system) required memorization of a huge volume

of discrete and disconnected facts. That experience, as well as my experiences over the years with Neohumanist schools who work under governmental restraints, highlighted the difficulty of integrating mindful, or contemplative practices in schools (both public and private) that are bound by conventional expectations of academic proficiency and standardized outcomes. Despite the fact that holistic practices often meet or exceed hoped for academic outcomes, it is an unfamiliar paradigm, not the linear, reductionist, rote form of pedagogy that most people recognize as teaching and learning. A learning environment in which the "multidimensionality" of the child is honored, one that cultivates compassion, inter-and intrapersonal awareness, aesthetics, intuition, and spirituality is going to look and feel much different than a conventional setting. To some observers, this "soft" approach to education may appear to preclude academic rigor, if rigor is associated with the ability to memorize facts and regurgitate them on exams. However, if understanding, application, and creativity – the higher levels on Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson, et al., 2000)—are valued, holistic education has much to offer.

The holistic education movement (see Miller, 1990) has long proclaimed the "spiritual dimension" of the child, but educational policy debates consistently get hung up on the entanglement of spirituality and religion, and usually throw out "the 'baby' of spirituality" with the 'bathwater' of organized religion. Shrii Sarkar was a vociferous critic of religion, decrying the bloody battles and indoctrination, the gender and caste discrimination, and the blind, irrational devotion to dogma by followers of religions, and consistently called for an "awakened consciousness" – the integration of rationality, intuitive discernment, and ethics. Neohumanist education is a unique synthesis of contemplative practices (somatic awareness, meditation, Yoga, the arts, etc.), deep ecology and place-based learning, critical pedagogy, and decolonization.

Though I first wrote about Neohumanist education in one of the initial issues of the original *Holistic Education Review* (see Hatley, 1988), my recent work with Neohumanist schools has been a four-year, collaborative effort which has included a number of interactive webinars with experienced Neohumanist educators in 2019 that resulted in the initial chapters of my forthcoming book *Becoming One with the World: A Guide to Neohumanist Education.* Following these webinars, I was invited to design a program for teacher preparation that would be offered under the auspices of India-based Ananda Marga Gurukula, through the newly formed Neohumanist College of Asheville (NHCA) in North Carolina, USA. I wrote new book chapters to align with the classes offered in the program, and NHCA graduated its first cohort of certified Neohumanist educators in the summer of 2023.

When designing the program, I was moved to include a course on Contemplative Inquiry that featured the practices of Descriptive Inquiry, believing it to be a core methodology in the preparation of teachers who wish to teach in holistic ways. Given that many of our first cohort of students were practitioners of Yoga who had been meditating for a number of years, I was intrigued to see how they might approach the task of inquiry, and if they would discover that contemplative inquiry enabled them to become more effective teachers. I was particularly struck by one student's project, as she took on an inquiry

of a very challenging child, which we normally discourage people from doing on their first attempt.

A Practitioners Perspective

Didi Ananda Anuraga has been an acarya (teacher) in Ananda Marga Pracaraka Sangha (an international Yoga society) for over 30 years. She was posted to Thailand many years ago, where she started a school for stateless children, many of whom had been orphaned by the on-going conflicts on the border of Thailand and Myanmar (formerly Burma). This Neohumanist school and Children's Home serves over 200 young people from kindergarten through Junior High, many of whom have been traumatized by war and deprivation. She also runs an animal sanctuary for the many abandoned dogs and cats on the streets of the city that she lives in. She opened her Descriptive Inquiry like this:

> *I knew Boy was naughty and annoying to everyone, to children and teachers, and that he stole money and that he didn't seem to care about or respect other's feelings. He was branded a difficult student, disturbing the children in the classroom and defying rules and regulations. I had experienced him myself when a year earlier I had taught English to his class. I was well aware of his behavior and I had already asked myself why, but I would come to find out that I had not asked deeply enough.*

I just completed NHE 111: Descriptive Inquiry: The Art of Knowing the Child, facilitated by Professor Kathleen Kesson through the new Neohumanist College at Ashville. The purpose of the course, my sixth class in the Teacher Preparation program, was to make a child more visible over several weeks of observations in a variety of settings. I was eager to start this course in the hope of finding out more about Boy.

The first week the observation was aimed at noticing a chosen child's physical presence. I noticed the sloped shoulders of Boy, his slightly forward bent posture and how small he looked among other children. At the end of my first week of observations I concluded with telling myself: "What if I, as I continue to observe him, 'make believe' that he is a very beautiful, funny, playful good little boy that my heart desires to keep close?"

As the weeks passed the boy became more and more near and dear to me. Observing his temperament, I found that he had a quite choleric, extroverted nature that made it difficult for him to see others. He obviously needed persistent, patient guidance to help him calm down and learn to feel other's needs, but he lacked this guidance in an academic environment where connections did not go deeper than rewards and punishment.

When observing his relationships and connections with others I saw a lonely boy who only knew how to connect with others through bullying and annoying. The relationship he had with adults was that of asking them for money and sweets. Boy lived at a children's home, having been abandoned by his mother at four months, and later also by his grandma who raised him for his first 6 years. Everyone along his little life had failed in their duty to show him that there is love and that for someone, he was their dearest gift and their treasure. Despite the lack of affection in his life, I soon learned of his ability to connect with animals when he gave his bed and blanket to the

cat while he himself slept on the floor beside the mattress. He was kind to the dogs as well and easily gave them hugs.

Observing his interests made it clear to me that he struggled with focusing. No activity seemed to catch his interest for very long. Boy was on a childhood mission of seeking provisions for unfulfilled needs and it made him restless. He was interested in marbles and could play with them alone. One day I opened a cartoon with little Krishna of Vrindavan for him to watch. He soon got entranced with little Krishna. Something grew in him, and he spent hours drawing pictures, one after the other.

When it came to observing his thinking and learning processes, it was obvious that he didn't learn well academically. He couldn't read and write yet nor had he learned to understand and communicate with others. It seemed to me that Boy had formed the mental schema of a hostile world where he had not been welcomed, but where he so desperately wanted to belong.

The final observation was to look at Boy's art. In his drawing "The Family" he drew mum, dad and three children where he himself was the tiniest child furthest away from the others.

Later he told me that he actually was the child between the mum and dad and I thought "Yes, take your rightful place Boy. It is your birthright."

In his next drawing, "The Ocean," he had placed himself as a tiny stick figure at the bottom of the ocean with poisoned snakes coming his way. He had earlier told me that he was afraid of snakes. After watching the cartoon movie of Little Krishna, he became Krishna in his next drawing and placed himself on the top of the hill while the mighty snake bowed down to him. (To conquer the mighty snake who brought havoc on the village of Vrindavan was one of little Krishna's

childhood victories). Other drawings he made were one of Jesus, then Buddha and several pictures with children happily playing together. In Boy's art, I saw no signs of violence, aggression or evil. Just the opposite, his pictures showed a fearful boy who lacked confidence but possessed a hidden resilience to overcome his obstacles and find his way to belonging and feeling a sense of self-worth.

Neohumanist teachers have an important responsibility to guide students on their journeys of self-development and personal evolution. To do this requires genuine attunement to their inner nature. I have learned that understanding the deeper nature of the child requires patience, careful observation and thoughtful reflection on the observational "data" we gather. In my experience intuition begins by sincerely wanting to know the child. By observing, interacting and diving into our own feelings to connect with the child, our intuition evolves. Our awareness of how the deeper child thinks and feels emerges, and in better understanding the essence of the child, we might become more effective teachers and guides for the children in our care.

Documentation as key to contemplative practice

Didi Anuraga's narrative offers us a glimpse into the deepening of relationship that can happen when one observes a child thoughtfully over time, and the ways that this approach can make the child more visible and expand the assumptions about their capacities and potential. When teachers are first exposed to this method, a common concern expressed is how much time it takes in the context of extremely busy school days to observe and record, let alone do this for all the children in their care. What I have found over time is that even if there is not scope for an in-depth review of every child, the more a teacher engages with the practice, the more it becomes a way of seeing, a habitual process of noticing, listening, attending, and reflecting. It is a method for "becoming present" and this mindful awareness enables "being fully there in the presence and as a presence to the other," as in the quote from James Macdonald that opened this paper.

The Review of a Child is but one facet of documentation that holds the promise to deepen the communication about teaching and learning between and amongst teachers, students, and families. Documentation:

> is a procedure that supports the educational processes and it is supported by the dynamic exchanges related to learning...Through documentation we leave traces that make it possible to share the ways children learn, and though documentation we can preserve the most interesting and advanced moments of teachers' professional growth. (Edwards, et al. 1998, p. 121).

These "traces" of children's learning can take many forms: photographs, audiotapes, transcripts of conversations with children and between children, videos, children's artwork, created artifacts such as sculptures or models, children's written work. Making such documentation available is important for a number of reasons. First, it can facilitate purposeful conversations among teachers and about ongoing work with children, enabling the formulation of theories, explanations, and innovations. Second, when families have access to such evidence of children's learning, they can better understand their child's developmental learning processes and discover ways that they can enhance the learning

experience at home. And third, in regard to children, it enhances their capacity to reflect on their work, and "supports the children's memory, offering them the opportunity to retrace their own processes, to find confirmation or negation, and to self-correct...it invites self-evaluation and group evaluation, conflict of ideas, and discussion" (Edwards, et al., 1998, p. 122). Teachers in the Reggio Emelia system of education and teachers in the network of practitioners that practice descriptive inquiry have honed these processes to a high level, and it has enabled the innovation known as *emergent curriculum*, a method of teaching and learning that is consistent with the important new ideas coming to us from the sciences of complexity.

Contemplative Inquiry, Complexity, and the Holistic Worldview

Contemplative inquiry, with its processes of observing, describing, reflecting and collecting students' work, is not merely a new form of child study to equip teachers with better tools for planning a curriculum and managing a classroom. It is, in fact, an essential aspect of a constellation of beliefs and practices that taken together, constitute a holistic worldview at the center of education. We often hear that conventional education, with its quest for certainty, its linear planning, its standardization, and its reductionist focus on the parts rather than the whole, is a reflection of a "Newtonian paradigm," an homage to the father of classical physics with its conception of matter as inert particles bumping into each other randomly in space. It's a durable worldview with a machine at its heart, an expression of a mechanical, disenchanted universe.

Quantum physics and the new sciences of complexity have brought us into a post-Newtonian world in which these ancient assumptions about the nature of the universe are being questioned, and in many ways, discarded. Many scientific thinkers now believe that the universe of particles is alive, that there is intelligence in matter, that mind/matter and spirit are interconnected, and that rather than inert parts bumping into each other the universe is a complex, fluid, intelligent, and dynamic set of relations (Griffin, 1988). While predictability is possible at some level of systems (a ball rolling on a horizontal surface still slows down as it rolls), quantum mechanics brings in elements of uncertainty and unpredictability. The vocabularies of chaos theory, quantum physics, self-organization, and complex systems present new ideas that enable us to move beyond the timeworn Newtonian framework to embrace the concepts of uncertainty, unpredictability, self-organization, immanent intelligence, and systems theory, metaphors more aligned with a holistic paradigm of teaching and learning.

Shifting the paradigm of schooling from the conventional mechanistic one, a Newtonian model that has been with us for over a century, to a holistic one, in which we come to recognize the interconnected, *organismic* and *emergent* nature of reality, requires a deconditioning of habitual thinking. We have all been conditioned since birth, by the institutions of our culture: families, school, church, and media. J. Krishnamurti, says this about habitual thinking:

> Our problem is the mind, the mind which is conditioned, which is shaped, which is the plaything of every influence, every culture, the mind which is the result of the past,

> burdened with innumerable memories, experiences. How is such a mind to free itself from all this…? (1994, p. 1)

Though it is probably impossible to free ourselves of all of our habitual thinking, we can at least recognize that we have been socialized to see the world in particular ways and admit that these preconceptions may be preventing us from seeing clearly and understanding the nature of reality. This is a good starting point.

Central to many understandings of holistic education is the idea of an emergent curriculum. The notion of emergence challenges the long-held reductionist view that the whole can be understood by analyzing the parts. One scholar defines emergence as "...the arising of novel and coherent structures, unexpected patterns and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems" (Goldstein, 1999). Think about what this implies for education that would be consistent with this new story of how the universe works. An emergent system of learning would acknowledge that:

- unseen forces are operating in every person (and in every system).
- learning is idiosyncratic
- the brain is a complex, self-organizing system
- new patterns and structures are to be expected and valued
- flexibility and adaptation are essential
- learning is a social activity
- a "living system" is a more generative metaphor than a machine.

To take these ideas seriously implies the importance of careful observation of both individual children and group processes, in order to discern the "unseen forces" at work, to intuit what it is that is wanting to be born, and to structure the environment to support this. In this context, teachers leave space for the free play of intuition and creativity, the interests of the moment, unexpected questions, and emergent opportunities for exploration, deeper inquiry, and play. Teaching for emergence is not a science, it is an art. There is not a map nor a checklist. The best teaching can be likened to improvisational jazz. A teacher who is aware of the nuances of the mood and climate of the classroom, who can pick up major themes as well as minor patterns in group dynamics, who has a discerning eye for quality, who is able to think creatively about solutions to problems that present themselves, who is able to help a group of young people create something that is so much more than the sum of its parts: this teacher is an artist.

The "quest for certainty" which has characterized the educational project for well over a century is slowly giving way to acknowledging the fundamental uncertainty of life in this post-modern world. A curriculum design process that embraces unpredictability is open–ended and fosters individuality, engagement, and relational thinking. It understands that much of what is going on in the classroom is beneath the surface. It welcomes surprises, and understands that emergent learning is contextual, collaborative, and goes beyond the norms of intended learning. Emergent learning "is about tapping into the as yet unknown and unsaid, sensing into what is wanting to be born, using collective sensemaking to manifest the 'magic in the middle'" (Chattopadhyay, 2019).

The language that James Macdonald uses in his description of the transcendental/developmental paradigm ("indwelling in the other...a touching of the sources of the other... being fully there in the presence and as a presence to the other") signals radically new ways of *being with* others, whether those others be people, plants, animals, or just the waves of the ocean or the sigh of the wind. The philosophical shift from Humanism, which has shaped modern schooling in innumerable ways, to a "new Humanism" requires a profound reorientation of our taken-for-granted ways of knowing and being, not just "unlearning" much of what we have taken for granted in our educational thinking but a genuine reconceptualization of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of our educational edifice. One place to begin is with the relationship between teacher and student.

Contemplative inquiry depends upon an opening of the senses in order to better see, hear, and *feel* what might be ignored, what has been closed to us. The adoption of an inquiry approach to education is an important alternative to the enforced standardization, high stakes testing, behavior modification, and judgment that characterize conventional schools. It accomplishes this in a number of ways:

- By making the strengths and capacities of children as learners and thinkers more visible
- By valuing the contextual knowledge of teachers
- By learning to value the multiple ways by which children come to understand the world
- By helping teachers to better see the world from the child's perspective
- By emphasizing the importance of having a variety of materials and experiences available for students
- By aiding teachers to personalize learning and provide relevant individual attention to each child
- By maximizing children's opportunities to choose what and how they learn
- By fostering positive relationships amongst the youth and adults of a school

however, more importantly, the form of inquiry described in this paper requires a slowing down, a reflective pause, a discarding of taken-for-granted assumptions about the world in order to make space for something new. Max van Manen puts it well:

> From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching – questioning – theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it. Or better, to *become* the world. (1990, p. 5)

To *become One* with the world, not merely to *know* the world, is the overcoming of the subject/object dichotomy spoken of in contemplative traditions. To be fully present and attuned to the world, bracketing thinking, judging, and analyzing, while trying to *see* clearly is how we cultivate the kind of deep understanding

Macdonald referred to. The dual dialectic, with its permission to fling open the doors of perception, unlock the sensory gateways to the vast world within (Jung's collective unconscious [1959], David Bohm's implicate order [1983], God, the Tao, or the Ground of Being, whatever we choose to name this) is to open up to the possibilities of the ever-expanding cosmos, the fullness of the self-organizing, intelligent universe, the realm from which intuition, imagination, and new thinking might emerge. With contemplative inquiry, in the context of the transcendental/developmental paradigm, we create space for holistic education to flower, and a way of teaching that embraces not only the wholeness of the learners in our care, but the wholeness of the world itself.

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