ENCOUNTER

EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Editorial

Montessori

Parents and teachers are often uncertain about Montessori education. They have heard positive things about it but worry it might be too structured. Montessori schools might discourage freedom and creativity. As a mother said, "I would be very sad if Montessori methods trained my son to think rationally at the expense of his free, soulful self."

Some of the negative reactions to Montessori stem from Valerie Polakow's influential book, *The Erosion of Childhood* (1992). Polakow observed a Montessori school in the Midwest, focusing on its toddler program, and concluded that the school imposed an adult-defined work ethic on the children. The teachers didn't allow opportunities for creative play; instead, they socialized children to engage in work in isolation from others. In the first semester of the school year, Polakow said, the teachers primarily issued "commands, instruction, and prohibitions related to work" (p. 83). She called Montessori education the "bureaucratization of childhood" (p. 98) and said the child is "acculturated into a work ethic where productivity, efficiency, and conformity are perceived as synonymous with healthy development" (p. 106).

Adult Authority

But this program (at least as Polakow described it) hardly exemplifies Maria Montessori's viewpoint! Montessori wanted children to learn on their own, according to nature's inner guidance—not that of adult authority. She believed an inner force prompts children to seek out certain experiences and activities at certain times. Children need these activities to develop their powers, and when they find them, they work on them with great enthusiasm and without adult supervision. Montessori's goal was to provide an environment that includes such activities, and she trusted children to freely choose them and work independently on them. The tragedy, she emphasized, is that adults rarely respect children's choices and natural development. Instead, adults assume it's their job to mold and shape the child to fit into adult society. Montessori was dismayed by the extent to which adults constantly direct, instruct, and correct children.

Montessori, then, would have been as opposed as Polakow to an authoritarian approach. Montessori's statements on this matter were often quite dramatic. She said, for instance,

> The child is like a soul in a dark dungeon striving to come into the light, to be born, to grow…And all the while, there is standing by a gigantic being of enormous power waiting to pounce on it and crush it. (1966, 34)

Montessori also observed that adult control is often subtle. Teachers everywhere get children to perform by using prizes, grades, praise, and criticism. These external inducements work to a degree, but their main effect is to make the child dependent on adult approval. They are the early means by which adults get children to conform to authority and the conventional social order. When the children grow up, they will be so interested in promotions and external evaluations that they will work at monotonous jobs rather than following their personal callings. To fully realize our potentials, both as children and as adults, we must find activities so intrinsically meaningful that we throw ourselves into them (Montessori 1967, 14).

If Polakow's study of the Midwestern Montessori school is indicative, Montessori schools have abandoned any vision of free and independent development. But broader research suggests that Polakow's observations are more the exception than the rule (Chattin-McNichols 1992). In most Montessori schools, the children work in relative freedom from adult direction. The teachers seem to follow Montessori's advice to present materials briefly and then step into the background, letting the child make her own discoveries. Although children usually work alone, they are far from isolated; they also talk to one another about their work and other top-

ics. Indeed, Montessori purposely mixed the ages in each class so the older children help the younger.

Make-Believe Play

Still, Polakow is right that Montessori de-emphasized make-believe play, especially among the 3- to 6-year-olds. Montessori acknowledged that young children spontaneously engage in make-believe, but she didn't think schools should spend time promoting it. She felt that young children have a greater need for intense work on other tasks, such as those that enable them to coordinate eye, hand, and mind, which is why children spontaneously work on these tasks with such enormous energy—if the environment includes the tasks.

On the issue of make-believe play, contemporary Montessorians are departing from Montessori's advice. Martha Torrence's survey findings (summarized in Chattin-McNichols 1992, 172-177) indicate that children in Montessori schools do often spontaneously engage in fantasy play with Montessori materials, and that most Montessori teachers allow the play to occur. Torrence also found that about a third of Montessori schools include play areas and play props. Torrence's survey, to be sure, was restricted to teachers associated with the American Montessori Society, which is more liberal than other societies. Still, it is my impression, from the various Montessori conferences I have attended, that the Montessori movement as a whole is increasingly permitting fantasy play.

In respecting play, contemporary Montessorians are departing from Montessori's specific recommendation while being true to her broader principle that the educator must follow the child. It's not for us, as adults, to decide what the child needs; we must respect the activities that children spontaneously and energetically engage in. Make-believe play is such an activity.

Toddlers

The focus of Polakow's study was on a Montessori toddle program. The children were between 1½ and 2½ years old. Since Montessori schools traditionally begin when children are 2½ or 3 years old, it's possible that the staff experienced special difficulties because the children were too young for the tasks. The teachers might have felt pressure to actively direct the toddlers toward outcomes that weren't emerging naturally.

In any case, Montessori recommended ways in which parents and caretakers can non-intrusively help babies and toddlers learn on their own. She gave particular attention to the child learning to walk. Many parents try to teach the child to walk, and when they venture outdoors with the child, they force the child to adjust to their own pace. Montessori urged parents to be more patient and to give the child the chance to learn on her own and in her own way. Montessori took pleasure in describing how some parents follow the child's pace, stopping when the child stops to examine things. These parents discover that their toddler can walk incredibly long distances, and the parents take delight in the enthusiasm with which the child explores the world.

It seems to me that Montessori's examples, as well as those from other theorists, point to an attitude that is beneficial in a wide range of situations. When a young child climbs stairs, wades in water, or runs downhill, the parent must be present for the sake of the child's safety, but the parent's presence is most helpful when it is unobtrusive, giving the child a chance to learn on her own. With older children, too, grownups need to restrain the impulse to constantly direct and structure children's activities, as they do for instance, in recreational baseball and soccer leagues. We are more helpful when we simply provide the sports equipment and unobtrusively keep an eye out for the sake of safety, allowing the children to play the games freely and spontaneously. In the hope that labeling this general approach will help people keep it in mind, I have called it *our unobtrusive presence* (Crain 2003).

Indoors and Outdoors

Many criticisms of Montessori schools focus on the indoor materials in the primary schools, which serve children from about 3 to 6 years of age. To many people, the materials, such as wooden cylinders and metal insets, seem overvalued. Montessori even suggested that if a child begins a task that is clearly too difficult for her, the teacher should gently remove it, saving it for a later day. Thus Montessori seemed to contradict her own belief in permitting

freedom and choice. What's more, the premium on specific Montessori materials seems excessive when one considers the wider world of objects—sticks, toys, tools, and so much else—that children can put to more varied uses.

But Montessori didn't select the indoor materials because she personally valued them. She selected them because she found that children took to them with such profound enthusiasm. Moreover, these are not the only classroom activities. Young children prepare meals, organize the room, learn personal hygiene skills, and engage in a many other activities. As children advance to Montessori elementary schools (between the ages of about 6 and 12 years), they pursue a variety of individual and small group research projects that take them out into their communities. Secondary students even operate their own stores, farms, and hotels. Montessori wanted the adolescents to run their enterprises in rural areas, if possible, where they could enjoy the open air and the sunshine, and where "the calm surroundings, the silence, the wonders of nature satisfy the need of the adolescent mind for reflection and meditation" (1976, 106).

Montessori emphasized that children of *all* ages need to spend plenty of time in nature's outdoors. She was among the first writers to criticize the way modern societies confine children to the sterile, human-built world. Insulated from the invigorating breezes, sunshine, and starlit skies, children become sluggish and irritable. Montessori wanted children to be able to run freely in the meadows, taking off their shoes so they could feel the grass and the mud under their feet. She wanted them to be able to rest under trees and sleep outdoors, laughing with happiness when the sun woke them in the morning. She called attention to young children's spellbound wonder at the sight of a small flower, water running over rocks, or a patient donkey grazing on a hillside. Montessori also made sure children had opportunities to garden and care for animals. First-hand experience with nature, she said, fosters the child's powers of patient observation and produces many emotional benefits. Most notably, the child develops a sense of being part of something much larger than herself, of living creation. She grows spiritually (Montessori 1967, ch. 4; 1964, ch. 10).

Theory

Underlying the methods and day-to-day experiences, Montessori schools are inspired by a theoretical orientation. Montessori wanted to tailor education to natural development, and she formulated development concepts that deserve greater recognition and study. I have pointed out elsewhere (Crain 2000) how Montessori anticipated Chomsky with respect to young children's remarkable linguistic powers, and how she mapped out highly original concepts of sensitive periods in development.

In my own work (Crain 2003), I have grappled with the question of how we know natural development when we see it, and I have found that Montessori provided many key insights. When children find tasks that enable them to develop their naturally emerging capacities, they become interested in them and concentrate deeply on them. And when they are finished, they emerge rested and joyful. They possess a serenity that seems to come from the knowledge that they have been able to develop something vital within themselves. If, then, we wish to evaluate the extent to which a child is developing naturally, we can look for indicators such as curiosity, the capacity for concentration, and serenity.

In this issue of *Encounter*, Ron Miller's article provides a fuller appreciation of another theme within Montessori's theory—spiritual development. Montessori offers a wealth of profound insights.

— William Crain, *Editor*

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Progressive Education and Civil Rights

Gus Trowbridge

Progressive schools differ from traditional schools not in their academic goals, but in their political values and social relationships.

In my childhood, I was imprisoned in a Dickensian all-boys school in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania. There, the boys were assigned to two feuding teams, the Light Blues and the Dark Blues. I was a Dark Blue because my brother had been one. There was no crossing over, not even in our seating arrangement at chapel. At Chestnut Hill Academy (CHA) I learned the perniciousness of competition. In the name of gentlemanly rivalry, our teams grew to hate each other, and we were taught that mastery meant dominion, that success required defeating the other side. The year ended in a huge tug of war with the headmaster drenching the losing team as it stumbled across the fall line.

My liberation and my initiation to progressive education came when my mother decided I would go to Putney School. Signs of my non-conformity had appeared the prior year when I was the only student at CHA to vote for the Progressive Party candidate, Henry Wallace. At Putney I became a life-long devotee of learning by doing, of the satisfaction of self reliance and physical work. I reveled in the absence of a grading system and was awed by a school that sought the highest of its students intellectually, creatively, and morally. The concepts of individualism, collectivism, and interdependence were in the school's blood stream, and my life was totally changed.

After college, graduate work, and nine years of teaching at the Dalton School, my wife Marty and I founded the Manhattan Country School. The year was 1965, in the midst of the civil rights movement. I was 31, and there was a youthful spirit to the times. Kennedy was the youngest American President, and Martin Luther King was only 25 when he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Age, in fact, didn't seem to be a factor in activism. Nor did class. Mrs. Malcolm Peabody, mother of the Governor of Massachusetts, joined freedom fighters in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1964, where she was sent to jail.

In 1965 Gus Trowbridge, with his wife Marty, founded the Manhattan Country School, a racially and ethnically diverse progressive K–8 private school. Mr. Trowbridge presented an earlier version of this article in his 1996 address to the Bank Street College of Education.

Manhattan Country School (MCS) was a deliberate product of the civil rights movement. Its core—a striving for justice and equality—has also always been the driving force of progressive education in America. At MCS, we maintain a diverse student body, both in terms of race and class. Civil rights issues are at the forefront of the curriculum, and students think critically about issues of justice during all their days with us.

The real voice of progressive education, like that of the spokespersons of the civil rights movement, is the voice of transformational ideology set into practice, and we should declare it proudly.

David Purpel (1989) connects the prophetic tradition to the credos of progressive education. The prophets, he says, were social critics who castigated and judged their society, utilizing society's highest goals and deepest values. Prophets

> demand that we return to a mindfulness that we have affirmed as our vision. They urge, prod, dare, and encourage us to change our ways and to continue the struggle to create that vision; they moan and curse, but not with despair alone; their outrage moves us to act and change rather than be defeated and resigned. (p. 81)

Writing about a curriculum for justice and compassion in education, Purpel describes the activism and aspirations that the civil rights movement and progressive education share.

The difference between progressive and traditional schools is not in their academic goals. Send identical twins with identical aptitudes to a traditional school and a progressive one, and I am convinced their academic achievement would be the same at 12th grade. What would be different about them would show up in their political values and in their social relationships. Traditional schools tend to maintain the existing order; progressive ones tend to undo it. For this reason progressive schools are seen as subversive, making progressive educators defensive. Instead, we should say what we stand for. As progressive educators we too often fail to accentuate the positive side of our thinking. We speak more forcefully about what we don't like than what we do like. The real voice of progressive education, like that of the spokespersons of the civil rights movement, is the voice of transformational ideology set into practice. It is the voice of the prophetic tradition, and we should declare it proudly.

More than any other institution, except perhaps for the family, schools today make children the people they will become. Progressive schools welcome an extended definition to this function. They make children people committed to social change. And believing in learning by doing, the best progressive schools measure their principles by their proximity to practices. Jonathan Silin's course description of Bank Street's "Practices and Principles" is as close a definition of MCS's mission statement as any I have seen. He writes, "We will explore what it means to teach in a democracy and to meet the twin demands of equity and excellence. The underlying assumption of this course is that education is a moral and political undertaking."

Progressive educators suffer unfairly from the belief that they are anti-intellectual and shoddy. There is nothing in the canon of progressive schools that favors shoddiness of thinking, or messy behavior. I wear a necktie purposefully, although we require no dress code of our students or faculty. The sloppiest appearance I have ever observed in schools was when I visited an arch-conservative school and saw boys legally conforming to the school's requirements with blatant contempt and in flagrant disarray. In an evaluation of MCS, the chairman of the administration team expressed surprise to me that we had gotten an A+ for "adminstrivia." Had he assumed that a school so committed to social and political reform could not keep its records straight? I was reminded of the response of one of my teachers who had come over from the Walden School. After his first fire drill, he shared his delight that a progressive school could conduct an orderly exodus.

At MCS we evaluate students through qualitative statements. The trouble with competitive marking systems is that they perpetuate hierarchy. One student's success rests on another's failure. Progressive schools' standards of achievement are not based on normative rankings that undermine the goals of equal respect and cooperation.

Of course, we know what may be expected of our students. We set for them a higher standard, which is to have all students succeed. Good progressive schools are among the most rigorous places to learn. I went to bed every night at Putney exhausted, sated intellectually and bodily, filled with music and stunned by revolutionary thoughts. Successful revolutionists cannot afford to be sloppy. The Jesuits know this. They get to places on time and their plans don't fizzle. Intellectual excellence should be a standard for all schools. By conventional standards, MCS students can and do perform as many years above grade level as students in traditional schools, and many of our graduates gain admission to Stuyvesant and Bronx Science high schools. In the end, one's own achievement, academic or otherwise, rests principally on one's self-confidence and on hard work, not simply on one's merit relative to others.

I was told once that if you had only one measure of a progressive school you could spot it by the expressiveness of the children's art work. What this says is that progressive education is a climate of creativity and of freedom from conformity. Progressive education is an ambience, carefully crafted by people who recognize that physical settings matter. People who sit in circles and people who sit in straight rows have fundamentally different perspectives. Labels matter, too. Children who are called 6-year-olds have a better sense of self than when called First Graders. When you arrive at MCS you are greeted in the Living Room. When you enter a lower school classroom, you see the names of the teachers listed alphabetically, not in order of Head Teacher and Assistant. I would not feel at-ease with the title of Headmaster.

When I was a child, I was told that I could not have my cake and eat it, too. I have always resented this adage. Progressive schools, I believe, share a rightful disbelief in this proposition. You can play and work at the same time; you can nurture cognitive and affective learning at the same time; you can achieve academic excellence without competition. Classrooms can be child-centered without teachers losing control. Teachers can be addressed by their first names without diminishing their respect. Moreover, progressive educators believe that America can embrace the paradoxes and conflicts of its culture that have driven us into separation, such as individuality versus community, equality versus excellence, or ethnocentrism versus universalism.

The essence of MCS is that it welcomes diversity. Its very name (which includes "Manhattan" and "Country") suggests diversity. We are not a Country Day School. For us, "Country" means our farm, which is an integral part of the educational program of MCS. Children spend part of the school year at the farm. The goal is to provide a natural setting that enables children better to know and respect one another by living together and by sharing the responsibilities of a highly interdependent community. The farm is a melding force. MCS joins together differences. Our student body contains no racial majority. Using a sliding scale which tithes all families according to their income, two-thirds of our families pay less than the maximum compulsory fee, otherwise called full tuition.

Diversity should be actively used to achieve our democratic ideals. It should not be feared, nor should it be blurred by efforts to impose assimilation. The melting pot was a false notion as was the idea that we should be color-blind. In arithmetic we are told that one plus one equals two, meaning that it is "the same as.'' Equality in human terms is not sameness. People who worry about the demographic projections for the 21st century should rejoice instead knowing that America may finally become the land that it was meant to be.

On our penny—now ironically nearly obsolete — appears the most precious Latin motto associated with the American dream: *E Pluribus Unum*, "From many, one." We embrace the paradox of the pluribus-unum model, asserting that unless there is inclusiveness, the American Dream will remain deferred for groups who have been historically excluded. Opponents claim that to obtain the pluribus destroys the unum; to have diversity threatens unity. We at MCS want to show that diversity works, that people can work and learn together.

If democracy is bringing everyone to the welcome table, a round table I assume, then we must redefine whose table we are talking about. The American Dream invites all people to the table. The failure of its realization has been that those controlling society have assumed America is their table. Like Orwell's pigs, who say, "All pigs are equal but some are more equal than others," the Establishment has never set the table with sufficient places for all. Those opposed to diversity are frankly afraid of a table to which there may be uninvited guests. Their fear is not fragmentation; their fear is loss of control.

My hope for the future of MCS, and for all of us inspired by the prophetic longings of progressive education, is that we can educate others, who can educate others, who can help us fulfill the dream. I look forward to new generations of schools demonstrating that progressive education and civil rights can succeed.

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Against Global-Speak

Daniel Bogert-O'Brien

The disembodiment of words from their particular cultural contexts, and their use as abstract or universal terms, does not expand understanding, but diminishes it.

M. de Vogüé loves travel; he goes to the East and to the West for colors and ideas; his interests are as wide as the universe; his ambition, to use a word of his own, is to be "global."
(*Harper's 1892)*

The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village.
(Marshall McLuhan 1962, 31)

In 1982 I sailed from the end of the trans-Canada highway to live for three years among the first nations of the Ahousahts on Florres Island, near Tofino, British Colulmbia. I did not reckon on the change in awareness the experience would bring. It was not that I lost all contact with the globe of technological progress and global thinking. Rather, the convivial culture of tides, mountains, salmon, whale, thunderbird, and human cousins, damaged by the crushing roll of colonial and neo-colonial culture and language, could still, like the trickster raven, surprise and subvert my plastic language and manufactured expectations.

I recognized the corruption of my tongue as I heard words spoken that were truly rooted in the depth and mystery of a living world. Each of these rooted words was a vital sound embodying some specific dimension of experience. These were words spoken at the shoreline between human society and the "others" of the natural world (Shepard 1997). The people had a living relationship at this shoreline of ocean and mountain that was shaped in a multiplicity of responsive forms. It differed radically from the unidirectional "quack" of my speech habits of global-speak and progress-talk. My modular language was made up of plastic words that appeared to be authoritative and scientific, but in fact were neither indicative of precision of thought or of particular actions and people. They were global abstractions that disguised the very realities they supposedly revealed and allowed colonizing forces to go unnamed and unquestioned.

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The quiet invasion of these linguistic mutations certainly predated my arrival in the village. However, being a curious, polite, and well trained professional, I soon was welcomed into all the homes and hearts of these generous shoreline people. Among them, I let loose in the air a newer more advanced strain of a linguistic virus. My liberal language of "liberation," "education," "progress," and "thinking globally while acting locally" was a friendlier and therefore more virulent variety of a linguistic disease.

The problem with global thinking and speech is that it simplifies the relational richness and dimensions of contact between the I and the other, ocean and land, whale and raven, dead and living.

When I first visited the village, one of my favorite slogans was "think globally, act locally." It was a phrase attempting to express concern for the obscene accumulation and consumption of material by Euro-Americans. Global thinking was intended to encourage a conscious resistance to commodification and exploitation. However, the problem with global thinking and speech is that it simplifies the relational richness and dimensions of contact between the I and the other, ocean and land, whale and raven, dead and living. It is a colonizing metaphor. For vernacular cultures and societies this phrase, which was intended to defend their interests, merely reinforced the erosion of local shapes and patterns, furthering the neo-colonial agenda. The complex relationship between one place and people and other places and peoples is not reducible to global thinking or systematics. The metaphors and images of human cultural interactions need to be multiple and relationally open, not uniform and enclosed in a sphere of colonial imagining.

When we think globally we act without fully attending to locally felt richness and depth. The intimacy and conviviality of close contact is viewed only as a sign of a larger more important global reality. Rather than regarding the place and its people as embodying truths and beauties that have significance in and of themselves, global thinkers see the local only as an artifact or bit of data in a global system. The local is understood as closed and restrictive. To consider it in all its depth as the place where the cosmos is known and shaped, requires words that have roots in living worlds that naturally overlap and make contact with other worlds and peoples.

On one particular day I rushed to a group home in Tofino to listen to the audio tape one bright, young, displaced First Nations man had made before hanging himself. He spoke of the loss of any depth or sense of meaning and of his inability to feel human contact and support. His voice spoke of the reduction of vital communities, of the living dance of human and other relatives, by the works of a global mechanism. His act was a tragic full stop in the chatter of global-speak. He said simply at the end of the tape, "I do not know who I am anymore. I have no place to be."

The "other" in the global scenario is included as the consumer of pedagogical devices or portrayed as having needs only a global system can satisfy. When these others are viewed as consumers or as clients with unmet needs, the global system can assimilate them as parts of global forms and institutions and purchasers of products and services. The quiet dictatorship of global-speak is a weapon in a war that progressively seeks to eliminate the others by placing them in ready-made roles and positions within a managed institutional sphere. By contrast, the encounter with the actual and given other introduces an anarchic and ineffable presence not accounted by institutional forms. The face of this other is cause not for some planned service or form, but for hospitality and celebration.

Hospitality

Louis Frank, my guide into the hospitable ground of the Ahousaht First Nation's world, would say it quite simply, "What does it mean to be an "Indian" to me? To live with respect for all others, to offer hospitality to those who come." This hospitality involves the unpredictable, for the giver doesn't know

how the hospitality will be received. It often involves giving to a stranger, and so involves mystery.

In the rituals of all traditions of hospitality—the potlatch, the Eucharist, the chanted Koran—there is a risk and a vulnerability that is strictly not manageable. By contrast, modern technological societies attempt to manage the risk of contact with others. What is not programmed is dangerously capable of transgressing orders and exposing the limits of calculation. Plastic words are attempts to avoid, or at least reduce to "variables" and "anomalies," the fleshy and inefficient revelations of human touch. From birth to death, global culture seeks to program and plan against the disruption, embarrassment, and insecurity of welcoming fleshy contact with strangers. From agribusiness to cluster bombs, the distancing and disvaluing of others is viewed as the inevitability of protecting and maintaining global progress, and minimizing the risk of contact.

Internet Webs

While perhaps "web" and "net" could be said to be replacing global-speak with their more hospitable metaphors, they are really nothing but programmed circuits drawn on the surface of chips in machinery, calculated to distance the user from the full meaning of contact with a stranger. This hardware consists of switches which can register only on or off, 0 or 1. The machine and its wired or wireless links are advertised as magic looking-glasses allowing "contact" without physical communion. But switches cannot offer a welcome to a stranger, no matter how quickly or how many of them one can interlace. My hand outstretched to the hand of a stranger gives more than the computer interfacing of switch on switch in the contact with her palm. As numerous as the switches that register her warm flesh, they are only expressions of a program and the manipulation of digits calculated to give data and not hospitality.

Communities of hospitality offer hands that carry much more than data or even the calculated intentions of the giver. The knowledge of these hands is not virtual or calculated. In contrast, the reductive free marketing of human and nonhuman difference as data and ethnic "sites" available "on command and on-line" is a sign of the technical colonizing of living communities by the dictatorship of a modular and calculating monoculture. By contrast, the hospitality of the hand knows the risk in the effort of extending out to a stranger. The hand has contact with depths well below any mapable surface point. When the hand is pulled back it carries back an unpredictable array of micro-organisms and the sense of a presence beyond predictable response. This touch cannot be registered by switches.

My modular language was made up of plastic words that appeared to be authoritative and scientific, but in fact were neither indicative of precision of thought or of particular actions and people.

The Globe and Its Early Use

We should consider how our word "globe," and its newer plastic cousins "progress," "development," "growth," "education," and now "liberation" serve a monoculture that fears the unpredictable reality of contact with the truly other. The disassociation of words from community life, particular human lives, cultures, experiences, and places, transforms them into quiet weapons in this neo-colonial war to control and ultimately consume the "other." Consider, for example, how often today the purpose of education is defined in terms of preparation for success in the global economy.

It is revealing to examine the first English uses of the word "globe," in the 15th and 16th centuries. Richard Eden, as an example of this early use, uses the word, translating the Latin *globus*, to describe the shape of his world as recreated in the voyages of European sailors, representatives of Europe's Imperial powers. The contact made is not one of extending or welcome other worlds or persons into experience but rather places them inside the globe controlled by the monarch.

Eden, as was common practice in early English usage, places the word "globe" in its Latin adjectival

role as suggestive of a spherical shape. However, his translating of these Latin texts of Spanish mariners had the self-avowed objective of encouraging the English Crown, its sailors and adventurers, to expand influence and overcome the Imperial advantage of the Spanish. An artifact contained in the palaces of the Empire, the globe was an image of a sphere of influence to be possessed. It was an abstraction indicating the capacity of imperial power to expand control over all the worlds mapped and yet to be mapped.

If we must use a metaphor for where communities meet, we might think of a dance that takes many different shapes and forms according to the ever moving relationships it expresses.

The globe held in the hands of its European makers became a spherical enclosure and prison for the multiple ways of being human that that the imperial forces met on their way. It reduced the diversity of human life to points on its surface. The many worlds of human experience within and outside Europe became dots, shapes, and colors on the surface of a globe as an artifact in the courts and in the hands of the powerful.

Speech

Speech, too, is often an act of hospitality and conviviality. When we speak, we offer ourselves to another's hearing and risk the response of the other. Language emerged as social interchange in particular landscapes as people wished to share experience and reach across the differences in their experiences. Speaking is multiple and many tongued. When Elio Antonio Nebrija (1444-1522) published the first grammar in any living European language, *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, he was expressing the modern attempt to replace the anarchistic and hospitable nature of speaking with a language mapped in a global system of grammar and dictated by its rules. Nebrija, even more ambitious than Columbus, set out to tame free and local tongues and bring them under the sphere of the empire (Sanders and Illich, 1988).

For Queen Isabella, Nebrija's proposals of a controlled and uniform language dictated by imperial authority was even less imaginable than Columbus's proposed voyage. The queen when presented with the manuscript for his new grammar could well appreciate the technical achievement of classifying living patterns. However, in her experience, grammar was a subject reserved solely for scholars who studied classic and dead languages, not the living tongues of her people. Even less could she grasp the idea that the tongues of her subjects should be controlled by royal dictates. Nebrija, just as Columbus, convinced her that the expansion of her imperial authority over territory she had not imagined would be a good thing. The globe would be a sphere containing all things, tongues, and people under the control of an imperial technocracy of clerics. The emerging culture of global-speak was a creation of a marriage between technical means and the desire to dominate and control even the speech of the other. The natural hospitality and conviviality of human speaking would be replaced by the calculated grammar of assent to grammatical authority. Nebrija was thus the bringer of a global empire Columbus, in all his bumbling about in boats on the Atlantic, could not have imagined.

The Eurocentric mapping of regions of experience on the surface of the globe progressed to the containing, controlling, and understanding of reality as bits of data in a global system registered and displayed by electronic mechanisms such as the computer. The shapes on the surface of the map are now registered by the electronic monitor. Today's imperial powers of commerce use the electronic and global abstractions of grammar, trade, economics, and politics. Any effort of hospitality has been even further corrupted by the technological ease of placing the stranger in a managed global system.

Today's global managers use global-speak as a means of managing and seeking to manipulate the real differences of place and spoken culture. The global manager does not live anywhere except in the expectations of what reality and what others must be to fit into the global system. While his words and acts exploit and extract from local places without ever be-

ing deeply touched by or extending to feel the faces and lives of these others who live in the richness and vernacular of place and community, they hide his own captivity. The global manager, so ably described by Paulo Freire (1981), oppresses in the same way he is oppressed by subscribing to the same global system he wishes to apply to others.

The individual, as imagined in the global system, has an insatiable appetite for global ideas and sensations. The individual, it is hoped, thinks a global system will satisfy desires and appetites for friendship, community, and hospitality. Freed from all contact with speaking and being in a local world, the individual is free to consume as much as possible in the global market. The worlds known in particular places and relationships are reduced to points on his tourist map, parts of a global market affording resources, products, and souvenirs of the latest trip above it all. The singular form and system has displaced the particular faces and multiple images, the many shapes and worlds of human experience. The globe and scepter held in the hand of Queen Isabela has been transformed with Nebrija's grammatical dictation into a linguistic container, a reductive device, an equation of production and consumption for all who can afford the passage.

Conclusion

In the world of progress and global education, the disembedding of words from particular cultural contexts, and their use as abstract and universal terms, is seen as the expansion of understanding. However, the application of such modular and plastic words has most often meant, in the development of Euro-American religion, culture, and society, an accompanying loss in sensitivity to and tolerance for the face of others and differences in their worlds of experience.

Marshall McLuhan (1962, 31) in a sly and deeply ironic critique of the global fiction of electronic devices, spoke of a "global village." The pretensions of global thinkers to reduce the complexity of human communities and worlds of experience to a single village was understood by Homer, Aristophenes, Amos, and Shakespeare. They all understood that the attempt to go beyond our mortal limit was to bring disorder. The hubris and idolatry of an Oedipus, Jeroboam, or Lear is dwarfed by a generation that believes the image on the video screen of a blue ball surrounded by a black void—no matter how compelling and beautiful in its own right—can summarize the beauties and complex relationships of local human lives, communities, and places. There is nothing small or constrained in a community that celebrates the surprise of human contact and the infinite meanings of place. If we must use a metaphor for where communities meet, it cannot be merely a global shape. Instead, we might think of a dance that takes many different shapes and forms according to the ever moving relationships it expresses.

What I have learned from meeting others who live in vernacular cultures, outside the dictatorship of global-speak, is that respecting differences requires words rooted in the rocks, soil, and flesh—words rooted in particular places, communities, and lives. While more hospitable generalizations and unifying words may emerge from our efforts to understand others, words of true hospitality are never abstractable from the specific encounter that includes the touch and feel of the flesh. People and groups may develop expressions that tell the stories of the many and the one in the dance of the other and the same, the known and the unknown. But such stories, to be valid, must tell of a particular and irreducible moment of meeting in the dance that demands not to be mapped or parsed, but to be welcomed and celebrated.

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Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo

The Educational Vision of Maria Montessori

Ron Miller

For Montessori, the growing human being is not simply a biological or psychological entity, but a spiritual entity seeking expression in the form of a human body within the physical and cultural world.

We must take into consideration that from birth the child has a power in him. We must not just see the child, but God in him. We must respect the laws of creation in him.
—Maria Montessori 1989a, 98

Maria Montessori pursued her educational work with a spiritual consciousness verging on mysticism. Although her ideas have been packaged and practiced for ninety years as a "method" replete with cleverly designed materials and recognizable classroom routines, Montessori's educational vision is far more profound than this, and essentially aims for a complete transformation of virtually all modern assumptions about teaching, learning, childhood, and the very purpose of human existence on Earth. This was recognized as early as 1912 by one of the first Americans to visit Montessori's experiment in Rome, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who reported that Montessori considered her "ideas, hopes and visions" to be "much more essential" than the techniques she had developed. Fisher (1912, viii) continued,

> Contact with the new ideas is not doing for us what it ought, if it does not act as a powerful stimulant to the whole body of our thought about life. It should make us think, and think hard, not only about how to teach our children the alphabet more easily, but about such fundamental matters as what we actually mean by moral life; whether we really honestly wish the spiritually best for our children, or only the materially best; why we are really in the world at all. In many ways, this "Montessori System" is a new religion which we are called upon to help bring into the world, and we cannot aid in so

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> great an undertaking without considerable spiritual as well as intellectual travail.

Much more recently, Aline Wolf, a Montessori educator for nearly forty years, reaffirmed this position, arguing that it was time for her colleagues to make the spiritual vision at the heart of Montessori's work far more visible and explicit (Wolf 1996). This shall be the intent of my essay.

An Educational Physician

Montessori was born in Chiaravalle, Italy, in 1870 and grew up in Rome. As she matured she became interested in mathematics and science, areas of study that attracted few women in her time or place. Overcoming prejudice and outright opposition, she became the first woman to enroll in medical school in Italy, was an uncommonly diligent student, and graduated with high honors in 1896. Immediately she embarked on a successful career as a physician, scholar, research scientist, and internationally respected advocate of women's rights. Her practice and research increasingly specialized in the problems of "mentally defective" children, and by 1900 she was involved in teacher training as well as direct pedagogical work with children. She undertook extensive studies of psychiatry, physical anthropology, and pedagogy, finding the pioneering work of Jean Itard and Edouard Seguin, earlier physicians who had worked with deaf-mute and "idiot" children, to be most relevant to her emerging understanding.

As I have pointed out elsewhere, this intellectual and professional background is virtually unique among educational theorists, providing Montessori with "an empirically disciplined approach to pedagogy and a therapeutic interest in the individual child" (Miller 1997, 158). Although she did hold strong views about women's rights and social reform, her educational approach was not the result of philosophical speculation or a specific political agenda, as is the case for most educational theorists; she maintained throughout her long career that education must follow the universal laws of human development as these are revealed in the lives of actual children, rather than seek to achieve social aims by imposing adult ideals on young people. We should keep in mind that any particular way of understanding or applying "universal laws" is affected by one's historical and cultural conditioning, thus no educational method is absolutely, universally superior. But it remains significant that Montessori's educational theory began with an unusually open minded experimental approach, which she enjoined her followers to emulate.[1]

Years later, Montessori's son Mario described her as a "positivist" and "disbeliever" during these formative years of her career, and her major biographer, Rita Kramer, called her a "freethinker" (i.e., essentially nonreligious, skeptical). Yet Kramer (1976, 91) also observed a "peculiar tension in Montessori between scientist and mystic, between reason and intuition," that showed itself as early as her years in medical school, when chance encounters with children inspired a sense that she had "a destiny to fulfill" (Kramer 1976, 45). Her work with children, culminating in the founding of the first *casa dei bambini* (Children's Home) in 1907, seems to have touched a deep place in Montessori's soul. Kramer reports that during these years she began attending an annual two-week spiritual retreat at a convent, while Mario Montessori suggested that his mother's conversion was rather dramatic: Thunderstruck by the transformations she observed in the children under her care, "she left her career, she left her brilliant position among the socialists and feminists, she left the university, she left even the family and followed Him [Christ]" (Mario Montessori 1984, 51). For nearly half a century, until her death in 1952, Montessori was a tireless crusader for the spiritual renewal of humanity, which she believed could occur only by nourishing the divine creative power within the children of the world.

Outside the confines of academic discourse, she lectured around the world, held conferences, trained teachers, and wrote several books. Beyond propagating the "Montessori Method," this body of work represents a prophetic vision of human redemption. It rests on a foundation of medical/psychological/biological insight (Montessori's understanding of human development as well as her ecological conception of life were well ahead of her time), yet her work is laced with Biblical imagery and religious fervor. This respected physician/scientist would unflinchingly refer over and over again to God, Christ, Scripture, and various saints.

Montessori had clearly become a devout Roman Catholic. By 1915 she was applying her educational insights to sectarian religious education and in 1929 published a book on *The Child in the Church*. Indeed, one extension of the Montessori movement, represented particularly by the work of Sofia Cavelletti and Gianna Gobbi, is an explicit Catholic approach to religious education in early childhood that nurtures the young child's personal relationship to God (Cavalletti 1999; Lillig 1999). Philosopher Robert G. Buckenmeyer (1997, 232n) asserts that Montessori's Catholic faith "is the basis for her educational philosophy, namely, that the child is created by God and merely loaned to parents and teachers whose job it is to respect the mysterious possibilities of each child…." He argues that in contrast to the Calvinist Protestantism that has influenced American culture, the Latin faith underlying Montessori's vision emphasizes the essential goodness of creation and humanity (Buckenmeyer 1997, 203n). "It was Christ who showed us what the child really is," Montessori proclaimed—"the adult's guide to the Kingdom of Heaven" (Montessori 1972a, 86).

Nevertheless, Montessori's faith was not merely sectarian—it was a transcendental, mystical spirituality, and as such it touched upon core religious teachings at the root of nearly all world traditions. Buckenmeyer himself found "oriental" elements in her thinking, and some commentators suggest that Montessori's seven-year stay in India during World War Two, as a guest of the Theosophical Society, influenced her worldview, particularly her notion of "cosmic" education which she expounded in the last years of her life. But I think Günter Schulz-Benesch (Montessori 1989a, 29-30) is correct in observing that Montessori's spirituality was universalist throughout most of her career and resonated with, rather than became substantially altered by, the "oriental" teachings of Theosophy. For her, the practice of Catholicism was an opening to a direct experience of divine presence, as it was for Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, or her fellow Italian, St. Francis of Assisi. It is significant that her teachings have been respected and even revered by people of many cultures and faiths, including Jews, Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. It was during my own Montessori training that I first encountered Sikhs, and I was struck by their deep interest in her educational vision. Members of the Baha'i faith, too, have found this vision compelling.

A Holistic Vision of the Universe

Kramer's biography showed remarkably little interest in the spiritual dimension of Montessori's life and work, and what she perceived as a "peculiar tension" between rationality and "intuition" was, in my view, neither peculiar nor tense. The blend of science and religion in Montessori's worldview forms the basis for a truly *holistic* conception of the universe. Similarly to fellow Catholic theologian/scientists Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry (among others), and in a way not unlike the "spiritual science" of Rudolf Steiner, Montessori looked carefully and deeply into the world of nature and found, not isolated material entities interacting mechanically, but a living and purposeful Cosmos. "All things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity" (Montessori 1973, 8). She was deeply impressed by the *harmony* she discerned in the natural world, the ecology of existence that gives every living thing a meaningful function in the larger system. Every species, indeed every individual organism, contributes to the good of the whole by performing its inherent "cosmic" function. This harmony has not emerged randomly, but expresses "a pre-established plan" that is "of divine origin"; she was convinced that "the purpose of life is to obey the occult command which harmonizes all and creates an ever better world" (Montessori 1989b). The Cosmos is engaged in a process of evolution toward ever greater harmony—toward the fulfillment of God's mysterious purpose.

The guiding belief of Montessori's educational philosophy, the fundamental point around which all her principles and techniques revolve, is her conviction that *humanity has its own special function to fulfill in this divine evolution*. The human species is "God's prime agent in creation" and it is our responsibility to "learn to do more effectively our share of work in the cosmic plan" (Montessori 1973, 26 and 33). Evolution is not yet complete; God's purpose has not yet been achieved, and the mission of human life is to give expression to the formative forces within us that are yearning to complete the cosmic plan. We are

called to work in partnership with the divine. This understanding of our existence places all our endeavors—our cultural, political, economic, and even our most personal strivings—in an entirely spiritual light: "The world was not created for us to enjoy," Montessori proclaims, "but we are created in order to evolve the cosmos" (Montessori 1989b, 22). In an earlier essay (Miller 2000), I argued that this striking statement is consistent with the teachings of great moral sages such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Heschel, and Krishnamurti, who all similarly asserted that we are on this Earth to contribute to the unfolding of divine justice, harmony and wisdom, not merely to amuse ourselves or satisfy our many material and sensual desires. In this light, education is not to be seen merely as preparation for a successful career or any sort of social or intellectual distinction; rather, education is the process of awakening the divine formative forces within every person's soul that enable the individual to make his or her own unique contribution to the cosmic plan, to fulfill his or her own destiny.

Montessori wrote that humanity's role in evolution is to construct a "supra-nature"—a social, cultural and technological extension of nature that calls forth ever greater dimensions of human creativity and understanding—a notion very similar to Teilhard de Chardin's "noosphere." This is humanity's task because we, more than any other living species, "can receive the emanations of the Godhead" and transform divine plans into physical and cultural manifestations (Montessori 1972a, 35). But she repeatedly observed that our material and technological progress had far outpaced our psychological, moral and spiritual development, and in the twentieth century it was imperative that we make a determined effort toward remedying this imbalance. Modern societies, due to their pervasive materialism, have neglected the spiritual forces that animate the human being, and our institutions, particularly schooling, have become repressive and damaging, turning people into "slaves" of the machine rather than cultivating their spiritual sensitivity, she wrote. Modern people are ill prepared to deal with the great moral challenges of our age, and are unable to resist the demons of nationalism and war that threaten to engulf the world.

To address this imbalance, Montessori envisioned a curriculum for elementary school students that she called "cosmic education." The purpose of this approach is to provide the young person with an expansive, inspiring vision of the grandeur of the universe and one's personal destiny within it. This is an education that gives life meaning because all aspects of creation are shown to fit into a complex, interconnected whole that is far larger than our customary limited worldview. Aline D. Wolf (1996, 97) comments that

> the value of cosmic education, as I see it, is that it places the child's life in a spiritual perspective. No one can be confronted with the cosmic miracle and not see that there is more to life than our everyday experiences. Fast foods, designer sneakers, video games and sports heroes all pale beside the wonder of the universe.

Cosmic education lifts the young person's consciousness out of the mundane, materialistic concerns of modern society and instills a sense of awe, touching a receptive and searching force within the soul.

This is exactly the sort of "spiritual reconstruction" that Montessori intended when she spoke at several international peace conferences in the 1930s, and asserted that only the spiritual renewal of humankind through education, not any superficial economic or political effort, could alter the violent course of human history: "The real danger threatening humanity is the emptiness in men's souls; all the rest is merely a consequence of this emptiness" (Montessori 1972a, 44 and 53). In recognition of her efforts, Montessori was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1949, 1950, and 1951.

Consistent with her holistic understanding, Montessori saw all of humanity as one nation, even one organism—an "organic unity." She considered people fundamentally as citizens of the Cosmos beyond their current social or cultural conditioning. Given technological developments of the modern age, she argued, it was time to put partial identities and false distinctions aside, and work together globally to achieve our "collective mission" of furthering the evolution of consciousness. It is education's task to encourage peaceful cooperation "and readiness to

shed prejudices in the interests of common work for the cosmic plan, which may also be called the Will of God, actively expressed in the whole of His creation" (Montessori 1973, 74). Her views on peace, social justice and democracy flowed from this holistic religious conviction that human beings all share the task of building a divinely ordered world. Idealism born of economic analysis or ideological conviction alone would not be sufficient. A socialist early in her life, at one point later in her career she addressed a group of communists and bluntly informed them that their social revolution would fail unless people were uplifted "towards the laws that govern human nature, which are connected to the very laws of the universe" (Montessori 1989a, 101). Democracy and justice *follow* from the unfolding of divine potentials, and social change is not authentic unless it springs from a genuine love of humanity, which is a spiritual, not simply an intellectual, commitment.

The Child as Spiritual Embryo

Montessori often compared the process of psychological and spiritual development to the physical unfolding of the human organism. Just as the material body first takes shape as a self-forming embryo, requiring during its formation the protection and nurturance of the womb that envelopes it, the human soul first appears in the newborn child in an embryonic form that requires nourishment from a psychic womb—the protective environment of loving, caring parents and a spiritually responsive education. Montessori's distinctive notion of the child as a "spiritual embryo" emphasized her key principle that the growing human being is not simply a biological or psychological entity, but a spiritual energy seeking expression in the form of a human body within the physical and cultural world. She compared the mysterious emergence of spiritual life in the child to the Incarnation of God in Christ described in the New Testament, "when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Montessori 1972b, 29). For Montessori, the Word is made flesh in *every* child born in the world; each human being has his or her path of incarnation to follow, his or her destiny. Montessori, like Emerson, referred to the "secret" within the soul of every child—the personal spiritual imperative that transcends whatever social prejudices, ideologies, and mundane educational curricula that adults seek to overlay onto the child's personality.

Reflecting on the unusually lengthy period of physical dependence that human infants (compared to other species) experience, Montessori was convinced that early childhood is designed to be a time of intense psychic receptivity. The young child takes in the world through an "absorbent mind," literally incarnating (taking into its bodymind) the sensations, impressions, and feelings it receives from the surrounding environment. One of the guiding principles of Montessori pedagogy, the concept of "sensitive periods," expresses her observation that young children move through periods of development during which they are especially attuned to particular characteristics in the environment. When they are ready to acquire language they hungrily, effortlessly absorb it by hearing it spoken around them; when they are ready to develop fine motor skills they begin to act on their surroundings accordingly. It is the task of parents and educators to provide the stimulation and resources the developing child needs at these critical times. Keep in mind that for Montessori this is not simply a biological or pedagogical responsibility, but a profound spiritual task, because the child is being directed by its embryonic spiritual energies to reach out to the world to fashion a personality. Careless parenting or education, by stifling optimum development, frustrates the child's spiritual formation.

Montessori frequently commented that the child creates the adult—not, as our modern common sense has it, the other way around. The spiritual energy seeking expression through the child's encounters with the world is engaged in building a person in a way that no adult education or conscious effort can achieve. By adulthood an individual's psychological identity is deeply engrained, and learning no longer takes place through "incarnation" or absorption. Therefore it is crucial for parents and educators to allow the child's own inherent nature to emerge and act within the world.

As Montessori put it in 1915,

> We must believe that all beings develop by themselves, of themselves, and that we cannot do better than not to interrupt that development. We must confess to ourselves that the psychic life of man is full of mysteries.... The

> preparation for the teacher is twofold: to be sensitive to the mystery and to be sensitive to the wonder of life revealing itself (in Buckenmeyer 1997, 35).

Montessori called the spiritual embryo humanity's "most precious treasure" because it was only this divine formative power that could transform the world: "The child promises the redemption of humanity, and we might say that this truth is represented by the mystical symbol of the Nativity" (1972a, 36 and 104). By failing to appreciate the value of this treasure, and educating young people only to participate dutifully in a materialistic, mechanistic system of economic production, modern societies are diminishing the visionary creativity, the moral insight, and above all the loving compassion that divine energies promise to bring to bear on the problems of human life. Montessori was convinced that through the child, these energies could be released into the world as a powerful source of good. It is evident throughout her work that the heart of Montessori's educational mission was not to introduce special techniques or materials into pedagogical practice but to make a fervent plea to the modern world to become "sensitive to the wonder of life revealing itself" through the life of each child. That was the appeal she made for fifty years to audiences and readers throughout the world.

The Children's Home

If we perceive Montessori's message in this light, the *casa dei bambini* she established in Rome in 1907 cannot be viewed merely as a prototype for a child-centered preschool. The term is usually translated into English as "children's house," and even many Montessori schools are named with some variation of "Children's House" or "House of Children." But the learning environment Montessori sought to provide was not simply a house—a physical space with child-sized furniture and developmentally appropriate materials. The correct translation of *casa dei bambini*, as Dorothy Canfield Fisher insisted in 1912, is "children's home." Feminist philosopher Jane Roland Martin (1992) explicitly built on this understanding of Montessori's vision in her concept of the "schoolhome"—an educational setting that provides the love, caring, and nurturance that young human beings vitally require for their healthy development. Martin observed that in the modern industrial age, as both men and women leave home to work, children are left without the strong "domestic context" that provides a nurturing womb for their psychological, emotional, and moral unfolding. She argued that even though John Dewey, around the same time as Montessori, sought to address the problems industrialization posed to children's development, Montessori understood far better than Dewey the role of this "domestic," traditionally feminine, realm of nurturing. Montessori "had inserted family love into school," an endeavor Martin regarded as critically needed in our time (Martin 1992, 14).

While this is not the place to discuss the details of classroom practice in Montessori schools, it is important to recognize that for Montessori and the movement she inspired, the design of a "home" for nurturing children's spiritual development suggests specific pedagogical requirements. First, it is necessary to understand the meaning of freedom in Montessori education. She often advocated the "liberty" of students in the learning environment, and emphasized the principle, quoted above, that "all beings develop by themselves" and adults "cannot do better than not to interrupt that development." However, she clearly did not mean to endorse the absolute trust in children's actions expressed by educators such as A. S. Neill or, later, John Holt. As long as a child is engaging in *constructive* activity, the adult must stay out of the way because divine forces are at work, but we need to be vigilant for lapses in concentration when a child's impulsive desires or negative reactions to earlier events start to dominate his or her activities. Montessori believed that the educator needs to be acutely sensitive to the meaning of children's behavior, and should distinguish between random, impulsive, destructive activity, and genuinely purposeful pursuits guided by "eternal laws" working within the child's soul.

Montessori sought, above all, to cultivate inner discipline through purposeful activity. In her view, the child becomes "normalized"—capable of acting responsibly, independently—through concentration. The educator's task is to assist the child in finding connections to the environment that call forth concentrated attention and effort.

It is the environment that educates, not the teacher directly; more precisely, it is the child's inherent formative energies, finding material in the environment to act upon purposefully, that calls or brings forth (the genuine meaning of the word "educate") the child's true nature. The educational process starts with the individual, with self-formation, and then extends out into the social life of the classroom. Progressive educators have always had misgivings about the Montessori approach because this emphasis on personal independence reverses Dewey's premise that all learning, and even the development of the individual personality, is grounded in social interaction. Montessori saw children growing from inside out, from a spiritual source, where Dewey saw the human being developed through dialogue and negotiation with the social environment. Montessori was not, however, advocating some sort of rugged individualism: She was convinced that a child allowed to develop "normally" would naturally forge a loving relationship with the larger world, starting in the classroom and radiating outward to all humanity.

Because Montessori emphasized the importance of the environment in learning, her theory has been criticized as being "empiricist" in a Lockean sense, meaning that she appeared to privilege sensory and intellectual content over imagination or the construction of meaning. The emphasis in her early childhood environment, in particular, is on "sensorial" materials, and she asserted that for the most part young children would gain more by being engaged in concrete activities (purposeful work) than in fantasy play. On this point, it is quite remarkable that even while Montessori's spiritual conception of the world paralleled that of Rudolf Steiner (Coulter 1990), her educational approach is vastly different from Waldorf pedagogy's explicit and detailed cultivation of imagination, and it differs as well from "constructivist" educators' emphasis on free play.

In short, to create a proper home for the developing human soul, Montessori argued that educators must provide a "prepared environment" that would answer to specific patterns of development as she understood them. In assessing Montessori's vision, I think it is useful to separate the *principle* that the growing child requires a spiritual home that enables the true self to develop from the *prescription* of what that environment must entail. I believe that the principle is universal, and that Montessori deserves enormous credit for formulating it. Yet, it seems likely that Montessori's own understanding of learning and child development, despite her claim to scientific objectivity, was partially conditioned by her own historical, cultural and religious context, just as any theory of pedagogy is necessarily so conditioned. If we truly have faith in the dynamic, possibly divine creative energies seeking expression through us, then it seems to me that we must be willing to subject our assumptions, our methods and techniques to the test of ongoing experience. We will find, I believe, that various portions of the Montessori "method" will be more or less relevant to the needs of particular children in particular situations at particular times. I believe we can acknowledge this, even as we appreciate the genius of this brilliant woman's soaring, liberating vision.

This essay has provided only a brief overview of Maria Montessori's spiritual conception of education. Yet these reflections are enough to make us realize that current educational policies, with their single-minded emphasis on unforgiving standards, rigorous testing, and accountability to corporate and bureaucratic elites, are a sad perversion of education's possibilities. We have before us the living child, the incarnation of cosmic energies, the potential source of social renewal and harmony among humanity, and we treat this priceless treasure as "intellectual capital" to feed our voracious economic system. Montessori proclaimed an alternative to the deadening materialism of the twentieth century, but, except for her relatively small following of devotees, her vision has been ignored and bypassed in the march toward global technocracy. I suggest that it is time to rediscover her vision. It is time, as Fisher declared ninety years ago, to "think hard" about "whether we really honestly wish the spiritually best for our children, or only the materially best."

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Note

1. Readers familiar with my work will recognize the point I am making here. In all my writing on holistic education, I have insisted that we look beyond the differences in particular methods and techniques and consider the essence of holistic education to be an open minded, open hearted sensitivity to the actual life of the child and to the specific social and cultural context of that child's life. Montessori and Rudolf Steiner were ultimately exploring the same deep truths about human existence, but they formulated distinct methods in response to different cultural needs (see Coulter 1990). John Holt, whom I mention later in this essay, derived his methodless educational approach (which finally evolved into what he called "unschooling") from an open minded sensitivity both to children and to the social and political milieu of his time and place that was every bit as acute as Montessori's to hers. To ask whose method (or nonmethod) is "correct" or even "universal" is the wrong question. What we need to know is whether our chosen pedagogical approach is truly nourishing the unfolding inner life of the young person standing before us.

School Vouchers and School Choice

Michele Forman

School vouchers will not improve public education.

This article is part of an edited transcript from a forum on school choice held under the auspices of the Vermont chapter of the American Association of University Women on January 12, 2004 in Middlebury Vermont.

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I am a high school teacher, someone who spends her day happily with your children working hard on education. To me, any education reform must be firmly grounded in student achievement. I'm not interested in reform that doesn't promise us an increase in student achievement and student learning. I'm the first one to admit that student assessment is a slippery eel and it is very difficult to nail that down, but we do not have firm evidence that tells us that vouchers promise an increase in student achievement.

Vouchers are an attempt to privatize education and I think that is to the detriment. I cannot support a program that will not apply to every student. Private schools have the right to exercise discrimination in admitting students. They need not admit every student. Your public school must and does. We are bound by federal law to provide the most appropriate education possible in the least restrictive setting. Private schools can refuse to accept a student with a physical handicap, a student who is emotionally disabled, a student who has a learning disability. This of course is not true for public schools.

Vouchers do not make it possible for all students to attend schools because in the first place, vouchers often do not pay the full tuition and fees and rarely do they account for transportation. In a place like Vermont, this can be very expensive.

And finally I cannot condone any program, vouchers, that drains money from our public schools. Public schools are not overfunded. We are always trying to do better with less money but any program that takes money from our public schools—make no mistake about it—will harm our children's education. You will see larger classes. You will see a lower quality of teaching. You will see older textbooks.

While I do not see evidence that vouchers will improve student achievement, I do, however, see an-

other danger. Vouchers, where we have seen them, segregate students. They segregate students by money. They even segregate students by race. And I think this is a detriment.

What we know about education, what we know about student learning, is based on theories of differentiated learning, of accepting the fact that students are individuals. Learning is idiosyncratic. Teaching must be geared toward individual learners not toward mass production education and unfortunately teaching individual learners is more expensive. It requires smaller classrooms.

School Choice

I support school choice. I support homeschooling for those parents who so choose it—but not at public expense. We simply do not have the money to fund these initiatives and improve our public schools at the same time. During the past year I have visited many inner city schools. The conditions in many of them are deplorable. Buildings are not only in disrepair, they are literally falling down. I don't see how teachers can possibly teach there.

Being Vermonters, we are practical people. There are a number of communities that do not have their own high schools who send their students to other towns and there are other more populated regions that also have a form of school choice. In addition, Vermont superintendents have often exercised the option to admit students from other districts when, for example, a student just needed a fresh start for whatever reason. There has always been that discretionary quality to our schools.

Currently in Vermont we do have a program where we have school choice. School choice is markedly different than vouchers, for we are not talking about money changing hands; we are talking about "you take a couple of my students and I'll take a couple of yours." The way it works in our community—and indeed throughout the state—is that area high schools join together with others of their own choosing. In Middlebury can accept up to a total of ten students from our partner schools. Currently we have nine such students. We haven't even reached our cap. It is not a big issue for us. Interestingly enough, eight of those nine students have chosen to come to Middlebury Union because of sports. I understand from talking to folks in the Vermont NEA that this is typical; this is not uncommon, let me say, throughout the state of Vermont.

So, we do have choice, but state education funding does not follow the student. The money stays in the town where the student resides. And bear in mind that when a block grant of say $6,800 follows a student and leaves the sending town, many of the fixed costs of original school is not reduced. We still have to plow our driveway and heat our building. The class size breakdown doesn't come clean and neat. We can't say "we can eliminate one class here" and "one teacher" there to make up the shortfall.

Student Diversity and Vouchers

I am a firm supporter of reform in education. We have come so far and we have a far longer way to go. Research in the past twenty years in education has taught us so a lot about how students learn. It is exciting to think about what we can do. I can report to you personally from my own experience and that of my colleagues that one of the best learning environments for our students is one which is not segregated. We have moved away from the segregation of students by perceived inability to learn. We know that that doesn't work. We know now how stimulating and exciting an unsegregated environment can be. I want my classroom to be both economically and ethnically diverse. I want it to have in it the sons and daughters of Middlebury College professors, of farmers, of students from rich families and poor families. I love the fact that we have students from different nations. This creates a stimulating learning environment. In an era when we are learning to differentiate learning for our students, I argue that the differentiated classroom is the more successful one and vouchers threaten that.

We have two systems of education in this country. I learned that when I traveled. We have one system of education for the middle class and the affluent and the rich and we have a second system for everyone else.

Some may talk about Middlebury having a premier college in town, and yet they condemn the high schools and elementary schools of this country as being mediocre. I say to you that the students who leave my classroom at age 18, in three months

will be in some of the most prestigious colleges in this country. Nothing magical happens in June, July, and August to that student. It is a mystery to me how people can say, "We have the best colleges in this country but, boy, do we have lousy high schools." The students are the same and I guarantee you that over the summer they don't kill themselves on academics!

When I said I supported choice, I mean choice Vermont style. Traditional, small local exchange of students without the exchange of money. I am respectfully and strongly opposed to the Governor's current plan that would allow an unlimited number of students in any school in Vermont to attend any other school in the state, and a $6800 block grant would follow the student, bleeding the original public school.

Some would argue that vouchers would create educational improvement through the "invisible hand of the market," but they lose sight of the fact that Adam Smith's unbridled capitalism brought us the abuses of child labor and sweatshops and the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory disaster. Children are not products. They are human beings. We cannot discontinue an unsuccessful line nor can we mark down or discard our failures.

You know, to be a teacher, is to be an optimist, because we are each day, in the presence of the enormous potential that each child holds. Our job is to unlock that potential, to work with that child, to lead that child to be all he or she can be. I'm sorry that does cost a lot of money, but vouchers are not the answer. Privatizing public education is not the answer. The answer is community involvement in our public schools.

"Love Flows"

Will Ashton

A young teacher is inspired to discover the wisdom entailed in the enigmatic advice of his Asian martial arts master.

I reached across the table to ladle some soup over my breakfast of warm rice and saw Master Suh standing in the doorway of the small kitchen. The sun was shining in the little window that looked out onto Ellis Street from the second story of the converted parking garage. I had been living in Master Suh's martial art gym in downtown San Francisco for nearly two months. I had recently earned my first-degree black belt. I had been Master Suh's student for almost six years. I was 29 years old.

On this day Master Suh was in one of his rare effusive moods. At times like these his *chi* radiated like a warm sunny day. Smiling, he called me over for a chat. Korean teachers rarely engaged in conversations or verbal explanations. You were told what to do and you did it. If you had questions you were rebuffed. Questions, I had learned, were interpreted as a lack of loyalty and respect. One of the outcomes of this approach was that you kept constantly on your toes.

So when Master Suh called me over for a chat, I was expecting anything. My first thought was that he had some nasty job for me—which he often did—like painting his friend's store or helping a family move into a new apartment. Instead the old man stepped forward and put his arm around my shoulder. He pulled me in close like I was his little grandchild. He was teasing me and started to laugh as he watched me squirm uncomfortably in a grip that was like iron. Easing his hold a bit, he smiled one of his most boyish grins and said:

> "William … you are a black belt now. You need to teach. Starting on Monday you will teach the children's class … everyday."

Once again I was taken by surprise. I had not expected to be teaching any classes, especially the dreaded children's class. For the past few months I had watched my Korean instructors try to handle the

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thirty or so kids that showed up each afternoon for their lessons. I wanted no part of it. The kids had near-zero attention spans with off-the-chart energy. But there was no way to say "no" to Master Suh. It just wasn't done.

Sensing my dread over the thought of teaching the children's class, Master Suh smiled again, this time with more concern and less mischief. He seemed to know what I was feeling, which was often the case with him.

> William … a black belt has to learn to teach. Don't worry…you will be a good teacher. But teaching is not easy. Fighting is easy! In six months I can make you a champion fighter. But to be a good teacher takes years … teaching is very complicated. Even so … there is only one thing you need to know: *love flows*….

He patted me on the shoulder and told me to finish my breakfast. And that was my first lesson on teaching.

The Interpretation

Today, I am an assistant professor in a college of education that is known for its strong teacher preparation program. I teach graduate and undergraduate courses in philosophy, ethics, and policy analysis. In the twenty years that have elapsed since Master Suh explained teaching to me in terms of "love" and "flow," I don't think I've once walked into a classroom without saying the words silently to myself. I do this unconsciously, yet with the understanding that by placing this intention in my mind and in my body, my spirit is given a path to follow.

When I first heard the words "love flows" I knew I didn't understand them. At the time I just listed them among the many enigmas I had witnessed in Master Suh's gym. Over time, however, the words took root and I found myself often wondering about their meaning. Much as I tried, I simply could not grasp the lesson that I knew was there. Yet the meaning seemed just beyond my horizon of comprehension.

It wasn't until five years later when I began teaching martial arts in my own school that the words began to take on concrete sense. I was renting gym space by the hour and holding classes two nights a week in an old hall that was owned by a German-American civic club. To attract students I gave public demonstrations of my art in any venue that was available. With no advertising budget, no permanent facility, and no students, I learned how one could "grow" a teaching/learning environment from nothing but one's intention. After three years of hard work my martial arts school had grown into a self-sustaining learning environment. And the truth of Master Suh's enigma began to unfold in front of me. I understood that love is something you share with others. That it is a foundation for relationships characterized by possibility. To say that "love flows" is to say that there is a stream of possibility. It is to be open to others' possibilities to develop what is best in them. This was a beginning—and only a beginning—of my understanding. I still cannot define what it means to say "love flows," but I can feel when it happens. Today I struggle to make love flow in my college classroom. And I wonder whether I can make love flow in such a way that it will open up the possibility for future teachers to make love flow in *their* classrooms.

I have found it useful to constantly think about what it means to "teach from the heart."

I believe that Master Suh was giving me a metaphor. This may not be what he intended, but I think that metaphors guide us, and I say "love flows" to myself before I enter each class. For me today, the question of how "love flows" becomes a question of how to bring my teaching in line with my heart. And "flow" is now understood as from one heart to another.

I have found it useful to constantly think about what it means to "teach from the heart." I keep talking about it. I ask colleagues about what the phrase means. I ask them what they consider the "heart" of teaching. I keep a journal that addresses my effort to describe my teaching experience in terms of the connections which link my heart and spirit to my work. I ask myself how my heart is touched by what I witness everyday in the classroom. What things in my daily surroundings nourish the spirit and the heart?

What things cause my spirit and heart to shrink back and become silent?

"Teaching from the heart" sometimes means being flexible. I sometimes give students extra time for projects. I sometimes tell them that they've worked hard and I am letting them out early. It sometimes means small gestures that spontaneously reflect my care, like baking cookies for them.

I want my students to have chances to be joyful and playful. In my classroom I invite students create and enact dramatic performances. I do this as early in the term as possible in order to set the tone for the weeks to come and also to instill the idea that our imaginations are going to be a vital resource during our course of study. For example, in my philosophy of education course we begin each semester by reading Paulo Freire's (1970) classic indictment of teacher-centered education, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Even though the text operates on a highly abstract conceptual level I ask students to create a dramatic performance as a way to outline and summarize Freire's ideas. How is this teaching from the heart? First of all it gets their bodies and their imaginations involved in the process of learning. It also suggests to the students that I have faith in their creative abilities. More importantly it indirectly asks the students to trust me because I am asking them to do something that many of them have never done before. I'm calling forth a new possibility. I'm asking them to make useful and productive links between reason and the imagination and to do so using a "playful" medium such as dramatic performance. I find that this exercise sets a precedent for learning through "heart-felt embodiment" and that it plays out in positive ways through the entire semester.

Another way that I teach from the heart is by talking about holistic and spiritual dimensions of teaching. I tell students that this is something I'm engaged in as a teacher/scholar and I ask them to describe their own experiences in classrooms that reflect these dimensions. I was surprised to find that many students have vivid recollections and stories about how they themselves have experienced teaching and learning from the heart. It is interesting to note that for many students these recollections go all the way back to their elementary school experience. Also of note is the clarity and ease with which students recall these experiences. It says something about the lasting impact that teaching from the heart can have on students.

A final thought on how we embody our teaching has to do with what our bodies say when we teach. There is no question that nonverbal communication speaks louder and more directly than words. I ask myself, "When I walk into my classroom each morning, what does my body say to students?" Does it say I trust you? Does it say I have confidence in your ability? Does it say that I have love in my heart? These are tough questions because they ask us to become conscious of our bodies in ways that our culture does not readily support. We rarely think of our bodies as tools of communication, and yet the research shows that our bodies do most of the talking. Teaching from the heart means using our bodies to express what is in our hearts. To do this we have to take stock of what we are doing with our bodies when we are teaching.

For example, consider how we listen to students responses during a discussion. What do our bodies reveal? Do we lean in or do we lean back when students respond? Are our arms in a rather open position or are they folded across our chest? Is our posture inviting a response or resisting it? I'm not advocating that we become method actors in our classrooms. But the truth is that teaching, like everything else, is a performance. So why not take advantage of this fact, and think about the ways our bodies communicate the spiritual dimensions of teaching?

While there are a number of excellent resources on nonverbal communication (Devito and Hecht 1990; Knapp 1980) perhaps the simplest way to begin is by reminding ourselves each day what it is we wish to invoke through our teaching**.** I keep old Master Suh's phrase in mind and try to let love flow through me as it shapes my communication and classroom interaction.

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Teaching from a Spiritual Perspective

Robert London, Aostre Johnson, Lourdes Arguelles,
Richard Brown, Sam Crowell, and John Donnelly

A spiritual perspective in education can help students connect with meaning, purpose, and value in their lives.

What does it mean to teach in a way consistent with a spiritual perspective? Are there principles and guidelines for teaching that are consistent with a variety of spiritual traditions and perspectives, the implications of the new sciences, as well as with some current educational psychologies? The steering committee of the Spirituality and Education Network has tried to address these issues in a collaborative research project begun in 1998. This paper summarizes our initial collaborative research to identify statements that are consistent with a spiritual perspective in education in the grades K–12.

The members of the network represent diverse spiritual traditions and backgrounds and include university professors, pre-K–12 educators, as well as psychologists, spiritual teachers, community activists, and artists. The steering committee of the Network includes six professors from five universities and one representative from the public schools.

The steering committee has made a commitment to conduct on-going collaborative research and writing, and meets semi-annually to plan the activities of the entire Network, including an annual working retreat on a theme connected to our collaborative research. The present study was conducted by the steering committee and grew out of work completed during the first retreat.

Method

The purpose of this study was to identify a core of statements that the seven members of the steering committee agree are consistent with a spiritual perspective in education in the sense that it would be difficult for us to imagine an effective school with a spiritual perspective not consistent with these statements. For this initial research, we avoided the difficulties involved in defining a "spiritual perspective

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in education" by approaching the research inductively. Mindful of the problem of the personal and cultural biases that we bring to this research, as well as the inherent mystery concerning the nature of Spirit, we intentionally refrained from attempting to define formally a "spiritual perspective in education." However, to provide some direction for the reader, we can speak generally of the word "Spirit" as a nonmaterial source of meaning and value in our lives, and "spirituality" as a recognition of an inner dimension of being that transcends the external definitions of who we are. A spiritual perspective in education, then, is one in which we contemplate how to nourish the awareness of this inner dimension within the context of an educational community and in the lives of the students we teach.

Our methodology included the following specific steps: First, the lead author interviewed 22 experts in the field, generating 159 statements potentially consistent with a spiritual perspective in education. Next, all the participants at the first Spirituality and Education Network retreat identified 80 of the 159 statements considered most consistent with a spiritual perspective. Finally, the seven-member steering committee identified the 38 statements that we all agreed in a relatively short period of time (a few hours) were consistent with a spiritual perspective in teaching. Even with the limitations of this study (see London et al. 2004), the steering committee believes that the results of this initial research can provide focus and direction for future research. In addition, our hope is that this list can be helpful to those involved with schools that are striving to implement a spiritual perspective. Specifically, these statements can be used as a framework or a basis of discussion, but should not be considered a "model" or "checklist." Taken as a whole, they are more appropriately applied to an entire school rather than an individual classroom.[1]

The Statements

We shall discuss the statements under four main topics: professional development and school governance; school atmosphere; teachers' attitudes and behavior concerning students; and general approaches to the curriculum and instruction.

Professional Development and School Governance

A school should be created out of a shared vision.

After the school develops a shared vision there needs to be time provided to deepen and implement the shared vision.

Staff development and community should be an integral part of the school's life.

Often those who work in schools are isolated from each other and may not have a sense of common purpose or theme behind their work as a whole. However, when a school collectively defines its vision and tries to manifest that vision in all aspects of its structure and function, it creates powerful possibilities. In most communities, it is preferable that the shared vision is developed through a carefully thought-out democratic or consensus-oriented process that integrally involves all groups of the community, including teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members and leaders. The school needs to allow enough time and resources to facilitate a vision that is truly meaningful for the school and the community.

The vision is supported by the school community as a whole as it creates its own processes of reflection, support, and self-cultivation. This kind of internal and external coherence then redefines what we think of as staff development. This sense of staff development is tied to the self-direction of a community to realize its vision through sharing, dialogue, support, and continued cultivation of the art of teaching. From a spiritual perspective, this sense of common purpose and shared community provides an opportunity to deepen awareness, to lend support to others and to work toward deep and significant meanings.

Ideally, teachers will be engaged individually in some spiritual practice, however this is defined.

Schools consistent with a spiritual perspective need to provide opportunities for staff to connect with their sense of an inner journey or purpose.

The school should provide time for the teachers to work together on their personal and spiritual growth.

Each person has a unique gift to offer the world. When teachers see their work as part of their own spiritual path, it enriches who they are and how they do their work. This principle could be seen as the "underpinning" of all of the statements. Ultimately, teachers "teach" who they are. The degree to which they have developed their "inner" (spiritual or contemplative) selves determines the degree to which they can truly awaken this in their students. A school consistent with a spiritual perspective ensures that teachers take the time to nurture themselves, and encourages teachers to see their work in terms of their life purpose. For example, the school can offer time in the schedule and quiet places for teachers to engage in spiritual practice.

There should be opportunities for the staff as a whole to at least occasionally do some practices together (e.g., a visualization exercise that involves approaching a wise sage or spiritual teacher with a personal question or a question concerning a problem at the school). There may be shared daily silence, prayer or meditation, or other spirit nurturing activities. There may be workshops or retreats focusing on some aspect of spiritual growth. These can help deepen a sense of community in the school.

Teachers should develop an experiential understanding of what it means to be present in the "now," discriminating between a state of being present and a state of not being present, and the sense of being "open to what is needed" that accompanies this.

Being aware and active in the present moment requires much practice. It is difficult to be truly present in the midst of teaching. We usually alternate between being awake and sleepwalking; sometimes we feel alive and fully engaged, and other times we are distracted and in a rut. We can practice cultivating wakefulness by first noticing and accepting whatever we feel and perceive. Then, by non-judgmentally returning to the present moment, we gradually begin to dissolve the divisions within ourselves and become more effective in offering what is needed to our students.

Teachers should actively engage in activities that support their imaginative capacities.

Teachers cannot nurture children's imaginations without first stimulating and nourishing their own imaginations. How can this be done? First, one needs to let go of the inner critic (e.g., the critical ego) that often stifles imaginative thought. Meditation can be helpful here: Teachers can simply compassionately watch their own thoughts and not feed or reinforce those that hinder creativity. Teachers who are mindful and living as much as possible in the present moment approach life and the classroom in a fresh and spontaneous manner. Living mindfully means trusting one's immediate intuition, which often facilitates the imaginative life.

School Atmosphere and Environment

A sense of spirituality in a school is reflected in how people treat each other in the school.

Kind, loving, compassionate, and selfless actions toward others form the cornerstone of most world spiritual traditions. These go beyond pleasantries and friendliness to an understanding that selfless acts of kindness and compassion make as little distinction as possible between self and other. Where there is an empathic sensitivity expressed, there is also an active response to assist and empower those facing difficult circumstances. There is a sense that students and staff are more willing to turn away from anger. Many times this process requires sensitivity to the nonverbal aspects of communication. These attributes enhance the total environment and create a positive and calming energy that is felt immediately by visitors.

Sensitivity to nonverbal aspects of communication is an indication of a sense of spirituality in a school.

In many spiritual traditions, there is an emphasis on being sensitive to what is actually needed in a situation, versus what our personality or ego urges us to do. Terms such as "cooperating with the Tao" or "listening to our higher intuition" communicate the benefits of openness to the mystery of Spirit in noticing what is "called for" in any situation in the school environment. Many times this process requires sensitivity to the nonverbal aspects of communication.

The school atmosphere should be implicitly accepting and supportive of students.

Students benefit greatly from support and affirmation in their school setting. The school can provide this support in a variety of ways, from a student-centered, comfortable, home-like environment to continually encouraging interactions with all school staff. In addition, teachers and school staff can convey this support implicitly through nonverbal means. For example, eye contact and a smile can be important elements in providing a sense of acceptance to students.

Students and staff need to develop awareness of and sensitivity to the physical environment of the school. A sense of spirituality is reflected in how people treat the school environment.

From a spiritual perspective, everyone has a responsibility to nature and the material world. School staff can help students grow into this responsibility in a healthy way by making the development and maintenance of the environment outside the school building a joint responsibility for themselves and the students. In addition to the normal maintenance of the environment, this focus can include projects based on student and community input to improve the quality of the environment outside the school building or the larger community in which the school is situated. Because students participate at all levels of the school and have a sense of the aesthetic, the results tend to permeate the environment. The school becomes pleasing and orderly, yet vibrantly alive. There may be gardens, flowers, animals that students actively care for and take pride in. It is clear that students are invested in the school and feel that they can make an active contribution to it.

Quiet spaces and places accessible to staff and students enhance learning opportunities for the school community.

In a media-drenched and technified culture where noise is ever-present, the provision by schools of places of silence and solitude designed to enable students and teachers alike to re-center their bodies, minds, and spirits, is essential to enhance learning. In these places, students and teachers alike can slowly, in a comfortable and relaxing manner, discover or rediscover their own inner silence. The presence of these spaces in a school is a constant reminder that for most spiritual traditions the deepening of a spiritual life cannot occur without periods of silence and solitude.

Ideally, students and staff will have opportunities to develop a strong connection with nature by having access to natural areas in which to both relax (e.g., take a walk or meditate) and work (e.g., maintain a garden or maintain trails).

From a spiritual perspective, our connection to nature can include both a receptive and an active aspect. Concerning the receptive aspect, students are likely to be nourished by nature if we provide opportunities for them to fully "be" in nature, with little or no supervision. For example, the school campus can include a natural area where students can walk or sit without an assignment or expectation. Or the curriculum can include regular excursions to natural areas (e.g., camping trips or walks in the woods) during which students are allowed some free time to be alone with nature. Concerning the active aspect, students can learn to contribute to nature by being given appropriate responsibilities such as maintaining a trail in a local park, caring for animals, or planting and maintaining a garden. The amount of adult supervision should be consistent with the student's developmental needs. For example, younger students might assist an adult in a project; older students might be required to define and implement a project approved by the teacher.

Each school will be different, designed for a particular place, time and context. No one model is appropriate for all schools.

The physical design, programs, and atmosphere of schools should be developed with the local community in mind. For example, programs should include stories, holidays, and legends indigenous to the community and culture. Environmental design of schools should be congruent with local architecture and conditions. Schools in warm or tropical areas can contain classrooms that open easily to the outside. Teachers, students, and parents should all have the opportunity to give input into the design of the school.

Teachers' Attitudes and Behavior Towards Students

Students benefit by developing genuine relationships with appropriate adult mentors.

Life unfolds by means of relationships and interrelationships. Students can benefit from experiences that require them to interact with adults in a mentoring situation. Adult models provide inspiration and ethical role models for students. They also give specific advice and guidance, and they teach by example specific knowledge and skills in their particular area(s) of expertise. One type of mentoring situation that can be particularly effective is when the student is an apprentice in a role that involves providing service to the local community. If the mentor is genuinely sensitive and compassionate, has a deep understanding of the context of the community service, and communicates effectively with others, she/he can provide a model for the student to experiment with developing her/his own style of community service. Moreover, if the student is involved by the mentor in the decision-making process involved in the community service, the student can later become a mentor for someone else; thereby, further benefiting from the experience.

Teachers should listen closely to what students are communicating.

Many teachers believe that they listen to their students, but perhaps few teachers have developed the capacity to quiet their inner chatter and listen closely to themselves and to others. Teachers with a spiritual perspective will seek, within the context of their chosen or inherited spiritual tradition, the necessary methods to develop this listening capacity on an ongoing basis. They will make sure that they hear and understand their students' point of view before they give their own. This might take the form of listening and then saying to students: "What I heard you say was..." In other words, they will share with the students what they understood, thus articulating their understandings and giving the students a chance to verify that they have understood with accuracy.

Teachers should experience and demonstrate a genuine respect for the students.

Respect in this case means to look beyond surface appearances and sense of duty. When the teacher experiences within her/his heart each student's uniqueness and interconnectedness, then that student is empowered to be fully herself. When the teacher has experienced herself/himself in this way, the experience of respect for the student is much more genuine. Respect means appreciating the student freshly in each encounter.

Teachers must be compassionate people who communicate their caring to students.

Teachers can work to develop their compassion. Compassion is more than a deep empathy for all sentient beings. It is also feeling with all beings, as well as putting effort in helping them overcome their suffering. Compassion, "feeling with," means empathy for the emotional experiences of students. If teachers actually resonate with students' feelings and openly allow that to show, then students can see that their own experiences are being affirmed. This process involves a willingness on the part of the teacher to ac-

tually experience the discomfort and pain that a student is feeling, not just intellectually acknowledging that pain.

Teachers must be sensitive to what is needed to nourish the unique unfolding of each student, in all aspects of development, including spirit, intellect, body, and emotions. In practice, many times this means not allowing our personal preferences to prevent us from "seeing" what is called for in specific situations.

Since all aspects of development are critical to individual unfolding, teachers will be equally sensitive to the significance of spirit, intellect, body, and emotions in each student. When teachers are open to all aspects of their students, and when teachers' intentions are to foster learning in its fullest sense, then meeting the needs of the students is paramount. Sometimes what teachers think students need is colored by what the teachers prefer to deal with rather than the actual needs of the students. When teachers are mindful of their own agendas, likes, and dislikes, then the danger of blindly clinging to them is diminished. Many times nourishing the unique unfolding of a student requires "not doing," that is, being aware of when our conditioned self "suggests" what a student needs based on our habitual patterns (versus the real needs of the student) and not allowing ourselves to be governed by those conditioned patterns. Rather, a spiritual perspective suggests that we try to be sensitive to what each individual student requires by, for example, carefully attending to what students communicate to us, verbally or nonverbally; and patiently waiting for a clear intuition or observation before assuming we know what is needed.

Teachers should recognize and address the fact that they may have unintentional tendencies to block students' development. The first step in this process is a personal awareness of the problem and a shared commitment by the faculty to address it.

Despite the best training and intentions, teachers may inhibit the learning experiences of their students. Teachers' deeply ingrained approaches to teaching and learning, based on a lifetime of their own experiences, naturally limit their effectiveness in knowing the very many ways students learn and unfold. By practicing openness and curiosity in the learning relationship, teachers become aware of their own inhibiting tendencies and are able to let them go. When entire faculties are committed to the process of experiencing awareness in teaching as a journey of personal and professional development, then both teachers and students can flourish.

Teachers need to encourage students to trust their intuitive knowing.

Wise beings from many cultures and historical periods have contrasted intellectual with spiritual or intuitive knowing. Intuitive knowing can be seen as the process underlying all other aspects of knowing. We live at a time and in a culture that denies or greatly minimizes this aspect of ourselves. Although it is present in each of us, many students need encouragement and support to find, utilize, and trust this ability. This encouragement can take many forms, such as silent connection from the teacher's intuitive self, the deliberate teaching of techniques such as meditation, and discussions about intuition as a form of knowing. If teachers are developing their own intuitive knowing and are willing to be open to the many possibilities for supporting students' intuition, they will be providing the needed encouragement.

Curriculum and Instruction

Although teachers may rely on substantive planning, they also need to be open to their intuition. Some of the most significant learning experiences occur spontaneously and teachers should be sensitive to them.

Substantive planning based on the best information the teacher has about the needs and interests of the students and the subject is the stage upon which learning takes place. At the same time, there must be opportunities for the teacher to follow their immediate intuitions. The teacher leads the unfolding of the daily learning experience based on the interplay of intellect and intuition. Intuition enters because the array of possibilities in any given teaching moment is so vast. A keen, open intellect is necessary, but only a practiced and trusted intuition can guide the flow of the learning experience in truly creative and

meaningful ways. This has been referred to as the "teachable moment" where the teacher responds to an emergent need or situation.

The curriculum should allow for a physical, aesthetic, emotional and intellectual connection to the content.

This statement refers specifically to the methods we use to teach content and concepts. This statement suggests that when we teach students new concepts, we should not restrict our teaching methods to just traditional methods that focus only on an intellectual understanding based on oral and written means. Instead, we need to vary our methods to include methods that allow the student to develop a physical, aesthetic and/or emotional connection to the content, including both how they interact with the content and how they demonstrate their understanding. For example, students can experience the difference between linear motion and other types of motion (e.g., motion effected by gravity) by moving across the room in a way consistent with both models; this kinesthetic approach allows students to feel the bodily difference between the different types of motion.

The resolution of dissonance and conflict (in the appropriate context) can be a source of or opportunity for growth in the curriculum.

The healthy resolution of appropriate naturally arising conflict and dissonance can result in the transformation of one's level of understanding. In planning the curriculum, it is important to include problem-solving situations that are both meaningful to students and at the appropriate level of dissonance. In addition, teachers need to be sensitive to naturally arising problems, not in the planned curriculum, that provide the opportunity for transformative learning.

Spirituality should be integrated into the learning environment both explicitly (e.g., through myths, parables, contact with nature, and sacred dance, music or art) and implicitly (e.g., through reverence, care and deep appreciation for all experiences).

Part of our task as teachers is to help students create meaning from their experience. Felt meaning is created through embodied understanding. We can help students develop this kind of meaning by providing opportunities for them to perceive deep connections and relationships in what they study as well as perceiving connections in their daily lives. Virtually every aspect of the curriculum can help them make these connections, from interdisciplinary connections to allowing for student choice and questions in the curriculum, to integrating myths, parables, nature walks, and sacred arts in the curriculum. Parallel stories that illustrate the deeper significance of curriculum are also effective.

The curriculum should nourish the child's sense of purpose and meaningfulness.

Part of the task of teachers is to assist students in relating to the quest to find their own unique purpose. A spiritual perspective allows students to see that the work that they choose can be related to their life purpose. Life can be viewed as a journey of discovering the soul's purposes and directions. In addition, purpose and meaningfulness are nourished when children are encouraged to choose and pursue topics of study that interest them and to make links to their own lives.

The curriculum should cultivate an attitude in students of testing all "truth" with their experience.

Many spiritual traditions emphasize the importance of discrimination and discernment, including the ability to test the validity of concepts by close observation of one's actual experience. One way of encouraging this is to allow and encourage student questions of all types. Another way teachers can cultivate this attitude in students is by expecting students to reflect on the consistency of concepts introduced in the curriculum with their own experience and observations. For example, if we structure an experiential learning opportunity, we can suggest multiple interpretations of the experience (or have students generate some interpretations) and ask the students to individually reflect on which interpretation is most consistent with their experience, and why. After processing, students can be asked to write their interpretation and explain how the interpretation is consistent with their experience. In this process, of

course, teachers must provide a supportive learning environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings.

The curriculum should be based on ecological principles, practices, and awareness and help students understand that each person is part of an interconnected whole.

An important ecological principle to emphasize is the understanding that everything is connected and related to everything else in the universe. Science has demonstrated this interconnection at a number of levels from the atom to the biosphere. Humans are part of this interconnection. The curriculum itself should reflect this by emphasizing a number of connections including the body-mind connection, connections among subjects, connections to various forms of community, and connections to the earth. The more the curriculum can move away from the traditional fragmented approach and instead move toward a curriculum of connectedness, the more students can make connections in their own lives. Another way to "teach" the students ecological principles, practices, and awareness is by applying those principles to the day-to-day activities and operations of the school. Are the classroom environments and the school building and grounds environment consistent with ecological principles? Are purchases and materials used in the school consistent with ecological principles (e.g., how efficient is energy use; are school lunches consistent with ecological principles)? In addressing these questions, it is important to provide for student input in a meaningful way, and provide opportunities for students to take actions concerning perceived needs.

The curriculum should help the student develop a strong grounded responsibility to self, others, and the earth.

A spiritual perspective in education can help students connect with meaning, purpose, and value in their lives. This connection needs to be well grounded in a sense of one's own wellness (both bodily and mental) as well as responsibility to other living beings and the material world. One effective approach to help students develop this connection is to give them a variety of opportunities to take appropriate responsibility, and to carefully (non-judgmentally) help them to process and reflect on the significance of those experiences. Community service/service learning becomes an essential component of the curriculum. For example, students can take responsibility for the care of animals or plants; do volunteer work in the local community; care for materials in the classroom or school; maintain gardens, school grounds, or public open space; or examine their interactions with other students.

The curriculum should have a strong emphasis on developing an appreciation of diversity, including diversity of individuals, cultures, and belief systems. Generally, exposure to diverse viewpoints, experiences, and people increases the opportunities for transformative growth.

Experiences with diverse perspectives, people, and other living beings reduce the potential for feeling threatened by the unfamiliar and also allow students to understand and celebrate the diversity of life. A curriculum that places a strong emphasis on diversity is anchored in the understanding that healthy communities and spirits not only support but need the diversity of all that lives. It is a curriculum that explores the socio-political, economic, and spiritual impediments to diversity that exist in one's inner and outer life, in the school, and in the society-at-large—impediments that do not permit the identification, utilization, and just rewarding of the gifts and the skills of all beings in a community. It is also a curriculum that addresses the dynamics and impacts of the ideologies of racism, classism, anthropocentrism, ageism, and heterosexism; and explores structural and personal remedies viable in an increasingly globalized and socio-economically disparate world.

The curriculum should aim for a balance between the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects of education and provide a strong connection to the body, a full emotional life, a competent intellect, and nourishment of the soul. Intellectual development should take place in this holistic context; the development of the intellect should not be prematurely encouraged.

In contemporary Western culture, the word *education* has often been reduced to a narrow focus on developing the intellect. A school consistent with a spiritual perspective would see the intellect in relationship to body, mind, and spirit. Evidence from contemporary research on the human brain and learning suggests that the mind cannot be disconnected from the body and the emotions. We cannot have a thought without involving body and feelings. Even if the emphasis is on the education of the intellect, we must consider the role of the body and emotions in learning and nurture them accordingly. But further, there are many reasons for educating the body and the emotions. It is becoming increasingly imperative for global survival that people live in balance with themselves and with their environment. In order to do this, they must become "embodied," respecting and nurturing their own bodies in harmony with the living world around them. They must also understand themselves and interact skillfully with others. This awareness would allow for the development of wisdom where the intellect is rooted in the heart.

The curriculum needs to recognize the variety of learning styles and intelligences of the different students.

It is becoming increasingly clear that people learn in an amazing variety of ways. Numerous theoretical approaches to categorizing these differences exist and some of them can be very useful in terms of understanding and working with diverse students. It is important for teachers to present ideas and skills in more than one form and to allow students a variety of approaches to learning and demonstrating what they know.

A curriculum and school environment consistent with a spiritual perspective supports aesthetics and imagination, including storytelling, drama, visual art, music, and movement.

There is vast evidence of the power of the arts in learning. Not only do they enrich our experience as humans, but the arts also provide alternative modalities to experience and express ideas and concepts. From purely an instrumental point of view, it has been shown that the arts improve cognitive performance. From a more holistic perspective, however, the arts open us to new meanings and understandings. They tap our creative potential and allow us to be more responsive to our learning. In a similar way, wonder and imagination are keys to intrinsic learning and deep understanding. When teachers help students develop their imagination, they help them envision new possibilities for their lives and the world.

The development of creativity should be one central focus in the curriculum, including time for students to express themselves in their own unique ways, and to develop the different skills involved in creative expression.

The ability to create may be our most distinctly human quality, that which most clearly distinguishes us from other species. Young children of all cultures exhibit a natural creativity in their play behavior; the tendency for human beings to become less creative as they grow up may be largely a result of social conditioning. Schools can facilitate the development of creativity by encouraging children to learn and express themselves in their own unique ways, by focusing on the creativity underlying each discipline of human learning, and by teaching skills related to creative expression in all disciplines.

Ceremonies and celebration should be an integral part of the school curriculum. This component can help the students see themselves as embedded in a larger world.

Ceremonies, celebrations, and symbols are by nature a communal activity and an act of creation. They are key in healing the wounds of human existence. They will remind those involved in the everyday life of a school of the interrelations between inward and outward; between mind, body, and spirit; between living beings and the cosmos; and between mental activities and material appearances. This awareness, in turn, will assist in the recognition of basic patterns of life that are not necessarily apparent on the surface of reality and not amenable to being taught through conventional pedagogies.

Teachers should pay attention to the rhythm of the school day, week, month, and year, including participation in informal or formal rituals marking these rhythms.

Most ancient cultures have created ways to connect themselves to the rhythms of the earth. Rhythms and cycles are part of the natural world. They are also part of our own lives and significantly affect our patterns of living. By explicitly referencing these rhythms in the curriculum, teachers participate in a relationship with time, earth, and transformation.

There is no "correct" method or technique for nourishing students' unfolding that works for all or even most students.

There are multiple excellent ways to "school" children and youth. Teachers with a spiritual perspective will be able to work in diverse settings (e.g., public/private schools, home-schooling, apprenticeships, learning nets) and with diverse approaches (e.g., cooperative learning, meditation, work, rote learning of texts) to enable such capacities. They will search in conjunction with their students, parents, and other teachers among all possible pedagogical and institutional alternatives in order to select skillfully those most appropriate. Such teachers will be open to what is needed and works best in their specific context and will not rule out any approach or setting based on prevailing notions of what constitutes good schooling and spiritual nurturance.

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Note

1. The comments elaborating on the statements were also written by the steering committee. Each member wrote a short elaboration for some of the statements so that each statement was clarified by at least one person. Although each steering committee member had an opportunity to comment on and edit the elaborations, the elaborations do not represent a consensus in the same way as the statements represent a consensus of the steering committee. The elaborations in this article are an edited version of the original versions.

The Mystical Child

Glimpsing the Spiritual World of Children

Tobin Hart

While children may not be able to articulate a moment of wonder or a religious concept, their presence — their mode of being in the world — may be distinctly spiritual.

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Traditionally, developmental theory has largely ignored or dismissed the idea that children have genuine spiritual experiences and capacities (Goldman 1964; Wilber 1996). Children have generally been seen as having insufficient intellectual growth to manifest anything that might be understood as meaningfully reflective and/or spiritual. For example, even contemporary transpersonal theorists like Wilber (1996, 2) describe children's mode of thinking and being as merely "instinctual, impulsive, libidinous, id-ish, animal, apelike." Assumptions about children's capacities remain guided by Piaget's (1968) stage model of cognitive development, in which young children are viewed as largely incapable of abstract or hypothetical thinking. Tied to this understanding of cognition, there has been a prevalent presupposition that genuine spirituality requires adult abstract thinking and language ability as exhibited in the higher stages of adolescence and adulthood (for a discussion see e.g., Dillon 2000). Most researchers have, therefore, concluded that children, especially pre-adolescents, do not, and cannot, have a genuine spiritual life.

In addition, until quite recently research on childhood spirituality has typically equated spirituality with "God talk"—how children think and talk about God or other religious concepts (e.g., Heller 1986; Tamminen 1991; Coles 1992). Through the imposition of such cognitive and religious standards, children's spiritual expressions often go unrecognized. However, children's spirituality may exist apart from adult rational and linguistic conceptions and beyond religious knowledge. While they may not be able to articulate a moment of wonder or conceptualize a religious concept, their *presence*—their mode of being in the world—may be distinctly spiritual. As

Gordon Allport (1955, 101) suggested, "the religion of childhood may be of a very special order."

Some theorists and educators have recognized children's more immediate, intuitive knowing as an innate source for character and spiritual growth (Richter 1887; Froebel cited in Lilley 1967; Steiner 1965). Rather than focusing on religious knowledge, adherence, or thinking and language capacity, William James (1936) understood spirituality as a more direct and personal experience of divinity—what he referred to as *personal religion* as opposed to *institutional religion*. Personal religion may emerge as a sense of interconnection with the cosmos, a revelatory insight, or a sense of a life force. These phenomena emerge as ways of being-in-the-world, intuitive epistemic styles, and types of immediate, ontologically shifting awareness or perception that may take place within or outside the context of religion (see e. g., Hart, Nelson, Puhakka 2000). Currently, there is a growing body of evidence documenting these kinds of spiritual experiences and capacities in childhood (Armstrong 1985; Hart 2003; Hay and Nye 1998; Hoffman 1992; Piechowski 2001; Robinson 1978; Robinson 1983).

Due to the legal separation of church and state the word *spiritual* is often considered out of bounds in public education. Yet I want to make a distinction between religion and spirituality. *Institutionalized religion*, as William James referred to it, is an approach to spiritual growth formed around doctrines, rituals, and standards of behavior. Spirituality (what James called *personal religion*) is the very personal and intimate experience of divinity. It is about who we are and how we know the world and this is integral to an education for meaning, social justice, character, depth, and wisdom. This consideration of children's spirituality is not about religious values, but it is purely a question of who children are and how they know—fair game for secular education. Said another way, this is about children's *world-presence*, their way of being-in-the-world, not about a worldview that is imposed upon them. This is an epistemic and ontological consideration, not necessarily a religious one. And ultimately how and what we teach our children depends, in part, on our presuppositions about who children are and what they are capable of. If we presume them to be largely libidinous, amoral or simply cognitively primitive, educational practice, not to mention parenting and religion, will reflect this. If on the other hand, we recognize them as having a "spiritual intelligence," how might our perspective and our practice be changed?

Based on five years of research (including interviews with children and families, a statistical survey of recalled childhood spiritual experience, the examination of case studies and the various research of others, as well as autobiographical accounts of historic figures) I will highlight five types of general spiritual capacities: Wisdom, Wonder, Wondering, Between You and Me, and Seeing the Invisible that I have observed in young people. (A more extensive exploration can be found in Hart 2003). My hope for this is that we begin to recognize the innate spiritual range and depth of children and then reconsider what education might be.

Wisdom

The spiritual traditions from around the world are also referred to as the wisdom traditions. In a spiritual life, wisdom seems to be something to both strive for and to use to reach toward the goal. We might reasonably assume that wisdom comes only with a great deal of experience, reserved for elders or for a rare few. However, in spite of their naïveté in the ways of the world, children often show a remarkable capacity for cutting to the heart of a matter, for accessing profound insight and acting wisely.

While the meaning of wisdom is difficult to pin down precisely, we can take a moment to consider it. Aquinas suggested that wisdom involves looking at things from a greater height and involves *gnome*, or the ability to see *through* things (Gilby 1967). Ralph Waldo Emerson captures a further dimension of wisdom in describing it as a blend of the perception of what is true with the moral sentiment of what is right (Sealts 1992, 257). The courageous and very risky acts of people like Gandhi, Jesus of Nazareth, and Martin Luther King imply that wise action moves beyond self-interest. We would not say that their actions were "smart," but they were deeply wise. Finally, wisdom is distinguished from bare intellect especially by its integration of the heart. Remarkably, at times even young children seem to exhibit these qualities.

Early in their new preschool program a three-year-old boy, who was having trouble fitting in, bit Chessie, also three, on the arm. She was naturally upset and was then very vigilant about this boy's whereabouts for the rest of the day. The next day, when he was sneaking up behind her and was just about to pounce, she spun around, pointed her finger at him, and shouted, "No!" like a parent. He stopped dead in his tracks and then moved away, leaving her alone for the remainder of the day.

The next day, he again tried to sneak up on her. Once again, Chessie spun around just as he was about to strike. He stood up straight and froze. She then stepped up and gave him a big hug. From that day on he never sneaked up on her. She made sure he wasn't left out during games or other activities and made certain that he had someone to sit next to during a video or story. As her teacher said, "She seemed to know exactly what this boy needed and took care of him while still setting limits."

As Chessie demonstrates, wisdom is not just about what we know, but about how we live, how we embody knowledge and compassion in our lives and, as Emerson said, blend a sense of what is true with what is right. While this is often the daily challenge played out over the course of our lives, some children seem to express this remarkably well.

Wisdom does not come from amassing bits of information; it is not a thing that's accumulated, not an *entity*. Instead it is an *activity* of knowing that takes us deep into the stream of consciousness, as William James named it. This is often described as involving an intuitive process of knowing. In some moments children find remarkable insight as they access this contemplative awareness that complements the rational and sensory.

Deep into one Sunday afternoon Haley, nine at the time, had a report to write for her class on a significant black figure in history. She had chosen Mahalia Jackson, the great gospel singer who had been a powerful voice for civil rights during her lifetime. Over the previous two weeks, Haley had found a book and downloaded a couple of brief one-page articles from the Internet on the singer's life. She was now finishing typing this report. However, she was not much of a typist, and so this was an arduous process.

As I walked into the room where she was working, it was easy to feel the tension and imagine her teeth grinding away as she pecked with a single finger at the keyboard. She had worked pretty hard on the paper and done a respectable job so far. Most importantly, she seemed to have learned a few things about Mahalia's life and about writing a paper. But as time and patience were running thin, she had reached the point that her goal was simply to finish the thing, which was due the next morning. Frustration was setting in, and she was still in need of a conclusion and desperately in need of a shift in mood. She took a break upstairs in her bedroom.

Fifteen or twenty minutes later, she hopped downstairs. "How ya' doing?" I asked. She said, "Good—I just saw Mahalia." "You did?" I said, not sure what to expect. "I was kinda' surprised that I actually saw her and how easy it was to find her," she announced. She then started to tell me about what Mahalia had said to her. I stopped her in midsentence and quickly grabbed pen and paper so I could take dictation. She then proceeded to tell me a wide range of very subtle and personal information about Mahalia Jackson that I could not find in the materials she had read. I checked.

After nearly ten minutes of relaying this rich material, Haley said that Mahalia wanted to tell her a "main thing" about her life. "Mahalia said that her life was filled with three things: joy, happiness, and fear. She felt joy that black people *and* white people were giving her a lot of attention. She felt happy that she was able to do just what she wanted to do: sing her [gospel] music and sing about love and God. She also said that she was afraid—afraid because she was getting so popular and helping black people and white people to come together that some people would not like it and might try to hurt her." These specific ideas were not at all explicit in the materials she had read. But they seemed to capture Mahalia Jackson's life with riveting clarity and directness.

After I finished taking dictation, Haley added some of this information as a conclusion to her report. She suddenly had a new sense of intimacy and excitement for this woman and for her research paper. Because of her very personal "chat," she now felt like she really knew Mahalia firsthand. This was a very different sensation than she had had just thirty

minutes earlier. A project that had been sliding toward drudgery now became one of inspiration, especially fitting for the nature of Mahalia Jackson's life, whose voice and presence inspired so many.

I asked Haley how she'd gotten in touch with Mahalia. She said, "It was easy; I just got relaxed on my bed … then, in my mind, I went to <www.mahaliajackson.com> and there she was standing right in front of me. We talked and she told me about her life."

Did Haley meet with the consciousness of Mahalia Jackson? Was this simply a nice example of her creative imagination at work or the value of taking a break in order to clarify and consolidate learning? It is hard to say; but what I continue to hear from children is that they have an ability to dip into the stream of consciousness and find insight and clarity. However we make sense of this, it was clear that she found a source of wise insight in a very intimate fashion (For a further discussion of this point, see Hart 2003.).

Just how unusual is this way of knowing? While there has been increasing evidence that children have direct and profound spiritual experiences, there has been no research as to whether this describes a few children or is a more widespread phenomenon. Naturally, this is difficult question to answer definitively, but a colleague and I conducted a survey based on phenomenological descriptions of a variety of spiritual experiences with 453 adults. These were primarily young adults enrolled in a variety of university introductory psychology courses taught by different instructors at my home university. The results suggest that the recollections of childhood spiritual moments are quite common. By itself this may have profound implications for our developmental assumptions. Related to the seemingly unusual experiences described above and in response to the question, "Have you ever had the experience of receiving guidance from some source that is not part of our usual physical world?" 61% answered affirmatively and 85% of those indicated that this occurred before the age of 18. Asked the question: "Have you ever found yourself knowing and/or saying something that seemed to come through you, rather than from you, expressing a wisdom you don't feel you usually have?" 54% said they had and of those, 80% indicated that this occurred in childhood and or youth (Nelson and Hart 2003; in press). I will refer to different parts of this study throughout this paper to provide some approximation of how common various phenomena may be.

Wonder

Childhood is a time of wonder and awe. The world is sensed through fresh eyes and ears. We hear wonder in the squeal of joy during a first game of peek-a-boo, in the dropped jaw and wide eyes in seeing an elephant up close, or in the curl of a smile in discovering a new favorite food. As adults, we taste wonder in moments when we are stopped by the color of a perfect sky, or maybe as we behold a child speaking, walking, or reading for the first time.

By wonder I mean a constellation of experiences that can involve feelings of awe, connection, joy, insight and a deep sense of reverence and love. It is an opening and acceleration of consciousness that occurs that can serve as a kind of nourishment for the soul. For children (and adults) sometimes these moments open so far and so deep that we find the depths of unity and ecstasy—the *mysterium tremendum*.

Mark and his eight-year-old daughter Miranda were at a quiet beach one warm, sunny day. Miranda soon wandered into the soft and steady waves pulsing against the shore. She stood in the water up to her waist, just moving back and forth with the waves. Ten or fifteen minutes passed and Mark thought that her eyes were closed. Thirty minutes went by and she was still swaying in the gentle surf in the same spot. After an hour, he found himself swaying with her as he sat and watched from the beach. It was as if she were in a trance. He wanted to make sure she was all right. "Was this some kind of seizure?" "Does she have enough sun screen on?" he wondered; but he managed not to intrude. It was nearly an hour and a half before she came out of the water absolutely glowing and peaceful. She sat down next to him without a word. After a few minutes, he managed to gently ask what she had been doing. "I was the water," she said softly. "The water?" he repeated. "Yeah, it was amazing. I was the water. I love it and it loves me. I don't know how else to say it." They sat quietly until she hopped up to dig in the sand a few minutes

later. "Somehow I felt completely overwhelmed, like I had been witnessed grace," Mark said.

The reports from contemporary children like Miranda are often indistinguishable from those of the great mystics of the world. These moments can catalyze spiritual development, as it did for a remarkable number of historic figures, like Catherine of Siena who had her most formative revelation of Jesus at six years old (Vineis 1960), Hildegard von Bingen who at age three, "saw so great a brightness that my soul trembled" (Bowie and Davies 1990, 20) and Ramakrishna who, looking up when he was six, saw the flight of white cranes passing across the dark cloud. In this moment he was completely overwhelmed, "seeing light, feeling joy, and experiencing the upsurge of a great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket. Since that day, I have been a different [person]" (Nikhilananda 1970, 3-4). These wondrous moments provided a touchstone and a beacon for the spiritual life that was to come.

Mechanism, materialism, modernism and their outgrowth, standardized multiple-choice testing, tend to "desacralize" the world, leaving it as inert matter for our manipulation. Wonder helps us recognize the universe as sacred and alive in our midst.

Karen remembers a powerful moment in her own secret place.

> I was fifteen, sitting in silence in my "special spot" outside a short walk from my family's house. I was just sort of tuning in to nature, the little birds and insects here and there. Then suddenly I had this experience of everything being connected. Both in the sense of just part of the same, but then, what was most amazing to me was there was also a sense of everything being equal–the majestic mountain, the blade of grass, and me.

In our study of recalled childhood experiences, nearly 80% of young adults said they sometimes feel a sense of awe and wonderment inspired by the immediate world around them and of those, 85% reported that their first occurrence was before the age of eighteen with 12% indicating their first occurrence prior to 6 years old, 27% between 6 and 12 and 46% between 12 and less than 18 years old. In addition, 39% indicated that they had had a moment of unitive connection ("Have you ever had an experience in which you perceived that all was really connected together as one?") and of those, 70% said it occurred at least once in childhood or youth (Nelson and Hart 2003; in press). Maslow (1971; 1983) referred to powerful moments like these as "peak experiences." The most common "trigger" for peak or unitive moments appears to be nature (Underhill 1961). The natural world remains surprising, mysterious, and profoundly alive; in some equally mysterious way it invites us into a resonance with it.

Powerful moments of wonder can shape a worldview and even the course of one's life. While I have offered somewhat dramatic examples of discrete moments, it may be the everyday way of being and knowing that describes childhood wonder best. Everyday events—a bird's song, a cup of tea, a great game of catch, a loving hug—become extraordinary when we fall deeply into them and simultaneously into that place from which our life flows. This moves us from living in front of things to living with them. And the greatest significance is not in how small or large a moment is, but in how those moments get walked out into our lives. For example, how does a flash of interconnection translate into character and compassion through a life?

A few hours in the surf may feel like a few seconds when we are absorbed in the "eternal now," as theologian Paul Tillich (1957) called it. The capacity for being lost in the moment—absorption—is a capacity that is natural for children and appears inviting of the mystical moment. Indeed, absorption appears significantly correlated with ecstasy and states of flow (Irwin 1985; Nelson 1989; Nelson and Hart 2003).

Wonder and awe not only describe a spiritual *experience* but also a spiritual *attitude*. In Zen Buddhism, this attitude or way of seeing is called *Beginner's Mind*. It means being open to the world, appreciating and meeting it with fresh eyes—just watching it (and ourselves) without preset expectations or categories. In what may be a similar vein, the Bible tells us that: "unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:2). The same hint is offered in Taoism, whose founder's name, Lao-Tze, means "old child." I think it is safe to conclude that this does not mean

childish, but instead childlike and full of wonder and openness, that allows one to see in a more immediate, open, and less categorical fashion.

Yet in a fast-paced, modernist culture and classroom we often discourage contemplative absorption that may appear as daydreaming or idleness (see Hart 2004); it is inconvenient to curriculum agendas. We have an innate capacity and even a need for wonder, but our society, for a variety of reasons orbiting around fear and a desire for control, tends to misunderstand and therefore represses wonder, even in children. In schools, for example, we are not interested in mystery but in measurable certainty and so activities direct children away from wonder, absorption, and depth toward more superficial and predictable activities. The daydreamer is made to pay attention; giggles have little place in a typical classroom; emphasis on material possessions overwhelms mystery; a demand for control closes off openness; fast-food style stimulation (TV, video games, etc.) overwhelms stillness. A child in the midst of wonder is often a source of concern to well-meaning adults—"Are they on drugs?" "Do they have some attention problem?"— and they may be disruptive to a tight schedule and a preset worldview. The vision may be denied and misunderstood, becoming a source of pain and shame for a child ("Nobody else is saying anything like this; I must be weird"). Children often learn that in order to fit in they have to shut down and in time they may come to doubt their own knowing capacity.

Abraham Heschel (1972, 74, 75) reminds us that wonder may be a centerpoint to our deepest learning and longing. He writes:

> Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance … to feel the rush of the passing of the stillness of the eternal…. The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe."

Between You and Me

"Spirit is not *in* the I but *between* the I and you. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe," wrote theologian Martin Buber (1958, 89). This is a *relational* understanding of spirituality in which the spiritual is lived out at the intersection of our lives; in the "between," as Buber described it. This is about how we treat and how we know one another. Do we know the other as an object to possess or manipulate, or as someone or something to understand, and appreciate?

What we meet—a tree, our neighbor, a book, the day in front of us—may not be as important as *how* we meet it. While modern conceptions generally locate "knowing" in the head, sacred traditions identify the most essential knowing with the heart. For example, the Chinese word *hsin* is often translated as "mind" but includes both mind and heart. Heart knowing is recognized as the eye of the Tao in Chinese philosophy. Plato called it the eye of the soul (Smith 1993). And the power of the heart is identified as "south" on the Native American medicine wheel (Storm 1972). Relational spirituality is about the kind of knowing that is open to communion, connection, community, and compassion. The spirit is brought to life in a genuine and open meeting, and Buber tells us that ultimately, "all real living *is* meeting" (Buber 1958, 11).

There are two general aspects of relational spirituality that children demonstrate. The first, empathy, can lead to the second, compassion.

Empathy has been described as the base of moral development (Hoffman 1990), and it may even be the trait that makes us most human (Azar 1997). Children have generally been assumed to be incapable of genuine empathy, or *feeling into* another, as the German origin of the word translates. There is confusion over the process by which empathy comes about because what is being described is a range of phenomena, not a single event, that are dependent on the process of knowing. Traditionally, empathy is explained as the result of a combination of cognitive perspective taking ("I can imagine myself in your shoes.") and feeling sensitivity. But empathy is often, especially in its most direct expression, an intuitive process, one akin to sympathetic resonance whereby one seems to pick up the feeling or bodily sensation of another (Hart 2000). It is this kind of direct deep empathic connection that many children are entirely capable of.

One woman explains how complicating this way of knowing can be for learning in a classroom:

> School was difficult for me because I tended to be unconsciously focused on what people were feeling. I had this tremendous empathy for someone who was having a hard time, and in the midst of feeling, I would miss the math lesson. I remember my fifth-grade teacher. I would just commune with her as I was sitting at my desk and she was at the blackboard. I would be staring at her, as all the other kids were, and then I would go into this other dimension where I would know what was going on inside of her and inside her life. It really is that feeling of moving into the energy, feeling oneness. But of course I was missing the math lesson.

What would we assume if we have a student or a child who seems spacey like this? Children who perceive in this way may be viewed as slow learners, autistic, attention disordered, on drugs, or given all sorts of other labels because they have not learned a less feeling-oriented way of seeing the world.

Young people have varying proficiency with any skill or ability: Some are remarkably empathic, others seem far less so. However, from our initial survey results it appears that the general phenomenon may be quite common. In answer to the question, "Do you ever feel that at times you know people's thoughts/feelings unusually accurately without being told or shown in any direct, physical way?" 70% in our survey indicated they had. 31% indicated the first occurrence was before twelve years old and 48% said their first recalled occurrence was between 12 and 17 years old (Nelson and Hart 2003; in press).

This way of knowing is not limited to human relationships. Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock described a less detached empiricism, one in which she gained "a feeling for the organism,"—she explored genetics through working with corn plants—that required "the openness to let it come to you" (quoted in Keller 1983, 198). The Other is no longer separate but becomes part of our world and ourselves in a profoundly intimate way and this may result in a recognition of interconnection or what Buber (1958) referred to as a shift from an *I-It* relationship to one of *I and Thou*.

Even small children can feel concern and care for a dead squirrel along the roadway, a dying tree, nature as a whole, or even for their difficult teacher as the following event demonstrates. "I had been having a difficult day and I must have shown it," Kathy, a kindergarten teacher related.

> I was frustrated and snapping at my kindergarten class in a way that felt justified at the time, but seems so utterly embarrassing, even cruel, when you look back on it. Basically I had "lost it" and was taking it out on them. I had insisted that the students be quiet, stay in their seats, and put their heads on their desks.
>
> I was sitting at my desk writing something when the tip snapped off my pencil—no doubt I was pressing pretty hard in my frustration. As I continued to fume, Jamie, risking more of my wrath, raised his head off his desk, got up from his seat, and walked over to my desk. "Here," he said, holding out his hand, "you can take my pencil. We know you're having a hard day." He put the pencil down in front of me, then turned around and walked back to his seat; he put his head back down. My frustration melted, and I felt pretty ashamed of my anger toward these "selfish" kids and grateful for his kindness and his courage. Kids can be so provoking, but here was Jamie offering me this perfect gift.

Wondering

While some children seem prone to moments of wonder or empathic connection, others seem like natural philosophers. Much to our amazement, even some very small children wonder about the big questions. They ask about life and meaning, knowing and knowledge, truth and justice, reality and death. These big questions are precisely what philosophy and religion have attempted to address. For many people the spiritual quest is focused and explored through pondering, puzzling over, and playing with such questions. As we marvel at a starry night or consider some injustice, a yearning to know more may start to germinate inside us, growing into profound questions and a life of thoughtful seeking. For individuals like Gandhi, who was famished for truth even as a child, entertaining the big questions is a way to enter a dialogue with mystery, with the spiritual (Erickson 1969).

Piaget concluded that early on a child lacks the ability to reason and reflect with any degree of sophistication (Piaget 1977). His work has, of course, been hugely influential in shaping how educators view children. However, there is increasing evidence that he was both right and quite wrong or, at least, incomplete. It does appear that children do go through cognitive development in stages. But these stages are general and broad, and represent merely a rough sketch. When we look a little closer, we can find exceptions to Piaget's model. Even young children have shown a capacity for thoughtful consideration of the big questions (metaphysics), inquiring about proof and the source of knowledge (epistemology); they have been successfully taught reasoning (logic), and to question values (ethics) and reflect on their own identity in the world (e.g., see Matthews 1980).

Piaget recognized that young children have an intuitive capacity, but did not see the power in it. Children may grasp a key insight or a broad understanding that captures the heart of an issue. They may not be able to explain in adult logic and language, but they sometimes comprehend deeply. As children grow, both the developing ego and societal expectations of how we *should* think become more pronounced; the intuitive function sometimes gets drowned out by ego-generated analysis and repressed by social norms. However, this is not a developmental necessity as some have suggested (e.g., Washburn 1995; Wilber 2000). So many of the children I have seen have kept their intuitive function alive and well even while developing sound analytic capacity and healthy ego structure. I believe fostering this balance is a critical challenge for parents and teachers interested in nourishing children's full potential.

Children's openness, vulnerability, and tolerance for mystery enable them to entertain perplexing and paradoxical questions. Philosopher Gareth Matthews (1980, 85) has said that children may be especially good at philosophy because they have "fresh eyes and ears for perplexity and incongruity . . . and a [high] degree of candor and spontaneity." Especially important to the consideration of spirituality, they can ponder what theologian Paul Tillich (1957) called "ultimate concerns": "Why are we here?" "What is life all about?" Or as my youngest daughter asked the other day, "Where did the first people come from?" But until this capacity for deep and radical questioning is more fully acknowledged it will be difficult for these natural philosophers to be nourished by their questions, at least in schools.

Jim, fourteen, looked back on his school career:

> I couldn't get my teachers to take my questions and ideas seriously. I thought this was what school was going to be about. There was such a big deal about going off to first grade, but I kept waiting for us to talk about life—you know, why we're all here, what this world's about. The nature of the universe. Things like that. When I'd ask or say my ideas just to sort of get things going, there would be dead silence, and then the teacher would move on to spelling or something. I thought, *OK, I guess we're getting the basic stuff this year, and then we'll get into the good stuff in second grade. I can wait that long if I have to*. Well, second grade came and went and it wasn't any better—maybe worse—since we didn't even get to play as much. By fourth grade I remember thinking, *I must be an alien. These people don't understand. I'm not a social zero; I have friends. But no one, especially not the teachers, are talking about this. School seems not to be very interested in my questions or any questions really; it is all about the answers. We're only supposed to give them the right answer.*

Questioning, whether for little children or accomplished scientists, is fundamental. If you are around young children, you may be familiar with ceaseless questioning, Why? Why? Why?—or maybe with children who pose those difficult questions that defy easy answers. At six, Julian asked, "What are heaven and hell?" and "What about the devil? Is it real?" He not only ponders how to get his little brother to leave him alone, but also earnestly puzzles over infinity, zero, God, and death. Radical questioning or pondering like this focuses priorities and provides spiritual nourishment and direction.

But we have come to expect convenient answers at the cost of entertaining rich questions. In schools, one right answer, often on a multiple-choice test, determines value, worth, and truth. Schools do not lack answers; too often they lack depth. Depth is associated more with asking good questions than

with having all the answers. Researcher Patricia Arlin (1990) has said wisdom is the capacity not so much for problem solving as for *problem finding*. Children have a remarkable capacity for identifying problems that we may have overlooked or taken for granted as adults. Four-year-old Dan wondered, "How did everything begin? Just tell me—is there a God?" Julian, five, asked, "Why are there more black people in jail?"

As a parent, friend, or teacher, what do we do when a child asks genuine questions? I remember how much I wanted the truth as a child. If my questions were dismissed or the answers lacked substance or vitality, it was like pouring water on a fire—on *my* fire. I rarely found playful answers lacking substance or vitality though. Sometimes the goofy way of looking at something led to some breakthrough.

And I don't mean that I expected the ultimate truth, although I'm sure I wanted that, but the truth of an honest answer that was thoughtful and genuine. Without deep responses, I remember feeling like I was being taught to lie or at least to live on the surface. But answers that had substance kept the questions alive. Even when I left more perplexed, with even more questions, it felt like I was really living. The tidy answers flattened the world. Honest answers, including and especially "I'm not sure; what do you think?" are nourishing.

Seeing the Invisible

We know the world is more than meets the eye. Much to our surprise, children often have a multi-dimensional awareness. My youngest daughter sees shapes and colors around people and objects. A boy tells us that an angel comforts him before he enters surgery. A young child says she remembers her "other family" from when she "lived before." A boy falls unharmed from a three-story window and tells about being caught by "those guys dressed in gold."

There are numerous maps of a multidimensional universe from both ancient and contemporary wisdom traditions that share commonalities. For example, ancient Kabbalistic writings contend that everything existing in our physical world originates in the nonphysical realm of the Sfirot. According to *The Zohar*, both the individual and the universe as a whole are composed of ten dimensions, the ten Sfirot, meaning "ten emanations" of light. Think of waves of light emanating out from a concentrated center— "a never-to-be-exhausted fountain of light" (Scholem 1995, 79). Each of these waves represents a different dimension or level of consciousness or reality.

Some traditions map this multidimensionality in terms of different subtle energy "bodies," or levels, that make up an individual and, simultaneously, the universe. Imagine finer and finer sheaths of energy surrounding our physical form. The "etheric", for example, represents the subtle energy that is recognized as the life force, or *chi* in Chinese medicine and philosophy, and is closely tied to the physical body (Gerber 1988). The levels beyond this represent nonspace, nontime dimensions of existence, akin or at least analogous to the hyperspace of superstring theory. For example, the "astral" level represents disembodied (i.e., not confined to the physical body) conscious, one in which emotions, for example, have their own reality and may actually be perceived as shapes and colors.

We can image that our awareness makes its way *between* dimensions through a kind of wormhole of consciousness that may be entered spontaneously, in altered states like sleep, or more intentionally through such practices as meditation. For example, during out-of-body and near-death experiences, as well as Dreamtime, as Aboriginals call it, consciousness leaves the dominant magnetic pull of the physical body and awareness opens in another dimension.

So when I use the term *seeing the invisible* I mean that in some way many children are tuning into these more subtle levels of reality as they apparently perceive the multidimensional universe.

Six-year-old Meg, announced to a visitor that she "saw colors around" the visitor. After some conversation about the colors and shapes that she saw, the visitor asked, "How do you see it?" "I see it inside here," Meg said, as she pointed to the center of her forehead. "You don't see it with your eyes?" the visitor asked. "Not really. I see it from my inside." Meg describes was an "inner" sense that appears as a parallel perceptual system to physical sight.

Michael was in second grade and had had a difficult childhood so far. He had been deprived and

abused as a young child, and his aunt and uncle were now raising him. He was still struggling in school, but he had come a long way. One day, very sheepishly and in private, he told his teacher, Mrs. White, about an angel that came to visit him regularly. His teacher said that it was easy to tell by his voice and his demeanor that this was very important and very real to him. Almost daily for several weeks, he would mention that he would see this angel. One day he spontaneously blurted out,

> "Look, Mrs. White, there's that angel!" He was staring outside. We had huge windows, floor to ceiling, in our classroom. I said, "Michael, can you describe him to me?" Still looking out the windows, he looked down at the ground and then he looked up—way up, like twelve feet high. Michael said, "He has a sword in his hand, he is whitish, he's strong." He added a moment later, "He makes me feel safe."

Diagnosable delusion? Fantasy compensation? Mere attention getting? Or spiritual sustenance and comfort? An objective measure is really quite impossible. While such moments are often dismissed or pathologized in contemporary materialist culture, a multidimensional universe makes room for such possibilities. The ancients might have understood Michael's visitor as his *genius*, which meant a guardian spirit. In the Middle Ages, the genius came to be known as a guardian angel (Liester 1996, 1). Socrates called his inner voice of protective guidance, Daimon, which means divine.

Ultimately, it is the quality of the encounter and the information or perspective provided and the impact this has one's life that is most salient for evaluating its significance. In the eyes of Michael's teacher, these visitations seemed as powerfully spiritual and as healing as anything this young boy had ever encountered.

In our survey of recalled childhood spiritual experiences, 90% responded affirmatively to at least one of several questions that addressed non-ordinary perception (e.g., telepathy, clairvoyance, and pre/post-cognition, near-death or out-of-body experience). Sixty-five percent claimed these experiences were a frequent occurrence; more than 85% said this occurred before the age of 18, with 52% indicating that their first occurrence was between the ages of 12 and 17, and 31% between 6 and before 12 years old (Nelson and Hart 2003; in press).

There has been some speculation that while these kinds of perceptions may be possible in young children, they naturally must disappear with the development of ego and abstract thought. Enculturation, especially schooling, reinforces a more or less homogenized way of seeing the world, one that may tend to push these open perceptional capacities underground. However, it is not necessary or desirable for this way of knowing to be replaced by ego-generated consciousness as Washburn (1995) has implied. Neither is this way of knowing simply irrelevant "pre-personal" phenomena as Wilber (2000) claims. The challenge for nurturing multidimensional perception is not *replacing* and correcting "immature" consciousness and perception with abstract concepts, but instead *balancing* natural presence and perception (being) with the world of ideas (thinking). Children may have something to teach us about reconnecting with an open perceptual presence toward the world.

Conclusion

We could say that these experiences of children begin to reveal a "spiritual intelligence." And like intellectual capacity, spiritual capacity is diverse. It is something *all* of us possess to some degree. It can emerge at different times, and it may require cultivation in order to be brought to full bloom. Unfortunately, it has been neglected and even repressed in our consideration of children, and thus many of us are left developmentally delayed as adults. Having lost touch with inner wisdom and a sense of wonder with compassion and deep meaning, with the rich multidimensional perceptions, our lives may come to seem second-hand—removed from the vital directness of our own knowing and experience, too often organized by fear or fashion (intellectual or otherwise) rather than trust and relationship in the deepest currents of our lives.

The growing evidence suggests that our encounter with divinity, our access to wisdom and wonder, does not wait until we have careers or cars. We live it as children, and it forms a center point for our lives; even, perhaps, serving the deepest source of human

motivation. While young people may be naïve in the ways of the world, and can be blindingly selfish and even cruel, they are already spiritual beings, have the roots of character and calling, and have access to wisdom and transformative wonder.

While I have highlighted some colorful examples of the spiritual life, the small, everyday perceptions, feelings, connections, and questions—the ways of being-in-the-world—are at least as significant as the more dramatic or ontologically challenging moments. Developmentally, these early ways of being and knowing—this *world-presence*—provide the foundation for a worldview and for an organic source of direction. And sometimes this also serves as a source of confusion in a world, a school or a household that does not acknowledge these possibilities, one that tends toward an adult-centric, rationalistic, and institutionalized understanding of spirituality.

Understanding this inner world of children may help us to notice the impulse for justice or compassion within the child in a world that often demonstrates callousness. Perhaps it also reveals the unique ways in which a child sees into the heart of the world or the very individualized expression of wisdom. It is hard to see the "angel"—the spiritual life—unless we believe it is possible.

Beyond a fresh lens that enables us to notice whom children really are, the consideration of children's innate spiritual capacities raises questions about what the point and the practice of education is or should be. A base of knowledge and know-how is the currency of education and important for functioning in the world. Information and basic skill acquisition, vocational preparation, or even critical thinking are necessary; however, they are also insufficient for deeper considerations of meaning, social justice, calling, creativity, and deep connection. An education that genuinely takes into account the innate spiritual nature of children would centrally be about the integration, refinement, and expansion of consciousness throughout one's life. Basically, I think this means harnessing the power of the mind and aligning it with the deeper currents of love, wisdom, and transformation (see Hart 2001). This would expand the consciousness of education itself, even turning education toward becoming a wisdom tradition. While there is some question as to whether our school systems are ready to take such a turn, the children I have spoken with surely are.

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Time for Play, Every Day

Why Play Is One of the Healthy Essentials of Childhood

The Alliance for Childhood

Children's play boosts healthy intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development.

There was a time when young children played from morning till night. They ran, jumped, played dress-up, and created endless stories out of their active imaginations. Now, many scarcely play this way at all. What happened?

- Children spend over four and a half hours per day in front of TV, computer screens, or video games (Woodard, 2000) ;
- They must cope with intense academic pressure and testing, beginning as three-year-olds;
- They have overscheduled lives full of adult-organized activities;
- They suffer from a loss of school recess and safe green space for outdoor play.

Play—active and full of imagination—is more than just fun and games. It boosts healthy development across a broad spectrum of critical areas: intellectual, social, emotional, and physical. *The benefits are so impressive that every day of childhood should be a day for play.*

The Benefits of Play

Child-initiated play lays a foundation for learning and academic success. Through play, children learn to interact with others, develop language skills, recognize and solve problems, and discover their human potential. In short, play helps children make sense of and find their place in the world.

The Alliance for Childhood promotes policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living. Its public education campaigns bring to light both the promise and the vulnerability of childhood. It acts for the sake of the children themselves and for a more just, democratic, and ecologically responsible future. For more information visit its website at <www.allianceforchildhood.org>.

Physical Development. The rough and tumble of active play facilitates children's sensorimotor development. It is a natural preventive for the current epidemic of childhood obesity (Pellegrini and Smith 1998).

Academics. There is a close link between play and healthy cognitive growth. It lays the foundation for later academic success in reading and writing. It provides hands-on experiences with real-life materials that help children develop abstract scientific and mathematical concepts. Play is critical for the development of imagination and creative problem-solving skills (Bergen 2002; Klugman and Smilansky 1990; Oliver and Klugman 2002; Pellegrini and Smith 1998 Singer 2003). There is even evidence suggesting that academic performance is boosted by recess (Oliver and Klugman 2002).

Social and Emotional Learning. Research suggests that social make-believe play is related to increases in cooperation, empathy, impulse control, reduced aggression, and better overall emotional and social health (Coplan and Rubin 1998; Klugman and Smilansky 1990).

Sheer Joy. The evidence is clear—healthy children of all ages love to play. Experts in child development say that plenty of time for childhood play is one of the key factors leading to happiness in adulthood (Hallowell 2002).

What We Can Do to Promote Play ?

Reduce or Eliminate Screen Time. Give children a chance to flex their own imaginative muscles. They may be bored at first. We must be prepared with simple playthings and suggestions for make-believe play to inspire their inner creativity.

Curtail Time Spent in Adult-Organized Activities. Children need time for self-initiated play. Overscheduled lives leave little time for play.

Choose Simple Toys. A good toy is 10 percent toy and 90 percent child. The child's imagination is the engine of healthy play. Simple toys and natural materials, like wood, boxes, balls, dolls, sand, and clay invite children to create their own scenes—and then knock them down and start over.

What Are the Smartest Things a Young Child Can Do with a Computer or TV?

Play With the Box it Came In! Computers tend to insist on being just computers, programmed by adults. But an empty box becomes a cave, a canoe, a cabin, a candy shop—whatever and whenever the child's magic wand of imagination decrees.

Encourage Outdoor Adventures. Reserve time every day for outdoor play where children can run, climb, find secret hiding places, and dream up dramas. Natural materials—sticks, mud, water, rocks—are the raw materials of play.

Bring Back the Art of Real Work. Believe it or not, adult activity—cooking, raking, cleaning, washing the car—actually inspires children to play. Children like to help for short periods and then engage in their own play.

Become an Advocate for Play

Spread the Word. Share the evidence about the importance of imaginative play in preschool and kindergarten, and of recess for older children, with parents, teachers, school officials, and policymakers.

Lobby for Safe, Well-Maintained Parks and Play Areas in your Community. If safety is a concern, organize with other parents to monitor play areas.

Start an annual local Play Day. For tips on how to do this in your neighborhood or town, see <www.ipausa.org>.

Other Resources for Reviving Play

International Association for the Child's Right to Play (Play Day kits): 516-463-5176; <www.ipausa.org>

Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (Annual Toy Guide): 617-879-2167; <www.truceteachers.org>

The Lion and Lamb Project (nonviolent play ideas): 301-654-3091 or 301-537-8193; <www.lionlamb.org>

TV Turnoff Network (Take Action page for limiting TV time): 202-333-9220; <www.tvturnoff.org>

Playing for Keeps (Play ideas and resources for parents and educators): 877-755-5347; <www.playingforkeeps.org>

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Book Reviews

Curriculum Wisdom: Educational Decisions in Democratic Societies

By James G. Henderson and Kathleen Kesson

Published by Pearson Prentice Hall (Upper Saddle River, NJ), 2004; 256 pages; paperback; $25.20.

Reviewed by Sharon G. Solloway

"Does this curriculum plan add to the beauty, the richness, and the harmony of a community's life? Will this decision foster generosity, compassion, and benevolence? What will be the effect of this decision seven generations from now?" These are questions that Henderson and Kesson ask in their recent book, *Curriculum Wisdom.*

Henderson and Kesson have been influential educators and scholars in the curriculum field for many years. Their newest book demonstrates their commitment to both envisioning and enacting curriculum that widens the sphere of who benefits from any particular curriculum decision. According to these authors, it is not enough for curriculum workers in democratic societies to just envision and enact curriculum based on knowledge and data; envisioning and enacting should also include wisdom.

Henderson and Kesson carefully lay out an argument, which suggests that curriculum decisions made outside of democratic wisdom offer little that will sustain democracy in the long run. Without an "arts of inquiry" (p. 47) approach to curriculum decision-making, they worry that the poor education that too many citizens receive ill prepares them for the empowered participation democracy demands. Working from the confluence of "practical, critical, and visionary inquiries" (p. 8), the authors provide a structure for working out educational decisions that take up the "wisdom challenge," (p. 101) that is, decisions made through thoughtful explorations of how they democratically advocate for *each* life the decision touches.

As I read Henderson and Kesson's argument for wisdom and deep democracy, I am reminded that, although the American democratic project rests on the right of each individual to live freely and fully, the nature of traditional public education and many past and present reform efforts short-circuit the right of teachers and students to live freely and fully in the classroom. Teachers and students are too often shackled to scripts constructed by experts far from the contexts of individual classrooms, teachers, and students. Such reform efforts seem to have the same disrespect for individual rights as have all histories of abuses of power. Henderson and Kesson decry the disrespect, bullying, and denigration of teachers and students found in curriculum reform that denies equitable effects for all stakeholders. They provide a structure by which teachers, students, and others interested in education projects might participate in deep democracy and construct meaningful curriculum within their own classrooms. The wisdom of this structure lies in the possibilities of educating a citizenry who root out abuses of power and respond to James Baldwin's (Thorsen 1990) piercing question, "How long is long enough?" The hope of this practice lies in educating citizenry who answer Baldwin with "It has already been too long. *Our* democracy shall be lived with the non-harming grace of thoughtfulness toward others as if they were ourselves."

With this text the authors have begun in education the kind of groundbreaking, awareness-raising, and structure-changing work that history shows is necessary to undo the harm of democracy practiced too narrowly. The task is not for the faint-hearted. Deep democracy demands struggle, courage, and perseverance. Wise curriculum decision making calls for no less. Perceived differences between Self and Other must act as triggers for a heightened consciousness

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that takes responsibility for ferreting out the inequity and injustice that lurk in those perceptions. Taking responsibility for this deep examination of the ramifications of a decision makes accountability redundant. Educators who are willing to answer this call will find in this text a structure for making "informed, publicly defensible judgments" (p. 3). Educational decisions must be constructed out of dialogues that emerge through the consideration of tough questions:

> Does this educational decision benefit all people equally, especially those who have been marginalized in the past? What kind of good life does this curriculum policy envision? Does this curriculum plan add to the beauty, the richness, and the harmony of a community's life? Will this decision foster generosity, compassion, and benevolence? What will be the effect of this decision seven generations from now? What does our community really care about? What is worth doing? How can we create a better world? (p. 6).

The reader is not left with this daunting and at first, overwhelming, challenge without encouragement and insights for getting started. Traditionally, curriculum decisions rely on "bite-sized facts, especially 'scientifically proven' facts … generated in specific situations … far removed from the particular concerns of students, teachers, and local communities" (p. 6). And all too often such decisions have a history of envisioning and enacting a good educational journey for a privileged few. To widen the sphere of who gets a good education in a democracy, the morality of curriculum decisions must be considered. I was moved by the authors' argument that this requires a personal commitment to both democracy as a way of life and "deep" decision making.

The authors call on educators to become "public intellectuals" who take up the "wisdom challenge" as a tool for their own immersion in democracy as a way of life rather than a definition of government. This living of "deep democracy" is necessary because we do not live "in a society that is just and compassionate, fair and equitable, and dedicated to the development of the full human potential of its members" (p. 38). The authors realize that this level of professionalism is demanding and largely unfamiliar to most curriculum workers. They assist the reader in identifying personal and structural challenges related to issues of time and power that act as obstacles to practicing curriculum wisdom. These issues can be overwhelming, but the authors' insights give the reader encouragement and make beginning the journey doable.

The heart of the authors' call for wisdom decision making is in their process of submitting the decision to multiple analyses. The decision must be analyzed through the lenses of seven modes of inquiry that are separate, yet interrelated. The structure for this process is illustrated with an image—the "arts of inquiry map" (p. 47)—to depict the process of building the seven modes into wise curriculum making. The elements of the inquiry map are depicted as holographic. Each mode of inquiry is part of every other. The separate elements are well defined, but are best understood as the curriculum worker applies them collectively to everyday curricular decisions. Living in a complex world precludes decision making that is anything less than complex and challenging. The "arts of inquiry map" will not eliminate the challenges, struggles, and ambiguities of such work. What it *will* do is provide a structure for developing an ever-increasing capacity for vigilant, thoughtful habits of mind and heart that more often cultivate "wisdom and the capacity to communicate that wisdom to a pluralistic public" (p. 45).

The reader is not asked to ponder the theoretical only. About half the text is devoted to the voices of diverse practitioners (teachers and administrators) who share their wisdom-challenge experiences. One set of narratives gives the reader a bird's eye view of the complexity, but also the possibility of envisioning and enacting wise curriculum decisions in school contexts across the United States. A set of international commentaries written by educators in Australia, the Republic of Benin, and India is also included. These international educators offer critiques for the usefulness of the wisdom challenge for solving curriculum problems in their particular educational contexts.

What sets this text apart from others in the curriculum field is not only its sensitivity to democracy as a way of being in the world but also Henderson and Kesson's commitment to wisdom as a way of life and their commitment to living deep democracy with wisdom. Early in the text the authors model this

commitment when they alert readers to their sensitivity to diverse voices. They acknowledge in a footnote on page four that numerous definitions of curriculum exist and these will be addressed in later pages of the text. This sensitivity deepens page by page as they evidence great care by either juxtaposing an opposing view with their own or by acknowledging critiques of such positions. For example, although they heavily rely on Dewey's pragmatism, they do not do so without also offering the reader foundational understandings of the contemporary critiques of pragmatism.

Henderson and Kesson splendidly achieve their purpose of creating a text that both "encourage[s] and facilitate[s] wise curriculum decision making in societies with democratic ideals" (p. 1). I can't leave this text and just go on as if I had not read it. It draws me toward a more ethical and moral response, "It has been long enough. The time has come. As a teacher educator in a public university, I have to hold myself to harder questions about the curriculum paths I construct. Do the curriculum paths I constructed for this semester envision and enact a good educational journey for each of my new students? Who will *not* benefit? Why? What will be the effects of these educational journeys seven generations from now?" Henderson and Kesson's seven modes of inquiry are not yet habits of mind and heart for me, but this text is a fine companion for beginning and sustaining that journey.

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Holistic Education: An Analysis of Its Ideas and Nature

By Scott H. Forbes

Published by Foundation for Educational Renewal (Brandon, VT, 2003), 406 pages; hardcover, $24.95

Reviewed by Martin Bickman

Scott H. Forbes's *Holistic Education: An Analysis of Its Ideas and Nature* is a wide-ranging, intellectually bold, but ultimately flawed attempt to delineate the very essence of its subject. Many of us suspect that beneath the apparent manifestations of holistic education, beneath the wide varieties of approaches and individual schools, there are fundamental consistencies that can be nudged into coherence and unity. Forbes takes the fruitful view that such coherence and unity does exist, but that it is so complicated and elusive that paradoxically we need a variety of methods to get to this inner core; he writes (p. 274):

> A combination of disciplines has necessarily been drawn upon for this book so that it resembles *Allgemeine Pedagogic* (as practiced in Germany and Holland), which holds that the activity of education is too complex for any large view of it to be approached from one discipline alone. This certainly seems to be the case in trying to understand the nature of holistic education.

Reflecting this methodological stance, Forbes divides his book into three distinct parts. The first is a synchronic, philosophical discussion of the essence of holistic education, centering on "Ultimacy," a term borrowed from the theologian Paul Tillich. Forbes uses the concept to include the highest state of human consciousness available, related to Abraham Maslow's "peak-experience," and a concern for engagement with something larger than the self. The second section is diachronic, devoted to six Authors (and the word is indeed capitalized throughout) whom Forbes sees as best exemplifying the historic heritage: Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Jung, Maslow, and Carl Rogers. The third section is synchronic again, focusing on what holistic education *does* rather than what it *thinks*. Instead of philosophy, however, this last section uses a conceptual scheme borrowed from the sociologist Basil Bernstein and centered on the distinction between a "performance-based" pedagogy and one based on "competence." Forbes here adds holistic education as a new fourth mode of competence-based learning to the three already delineated by Bernstein.

No one will accuse this book of lacking organization. The first part is organized into four chapters:

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Ultimacy as the Goal of Education, What Needs to Be Learned, What Facilitates the Needed Learning, and Aspects of Teachers that Facilitate the Needed Learning. Then, after a biographical sketch, each of the six Authors is subjected to the same methodological dissection in the same order: X's Notion of Ultimacy, What Needs to be Learned for X, Aspects of Students that Facilitate the Needed Learning for X, and Aspects of Teachers that Facilitate the Needed Learning for X. Further, within these sections each Author is discussed under virtually the identical subheadings, such as the following under the last category: Teachers' Understanding of Students and their Needs for X, Teachers' Understanding of the Correct Pedagogic Process for X, Teachers' Understanding of the Correct Pedagogic Relationship for X, and Teachers' Self-Development for X.

If the reader finds the paragraph above overly schematic and soporific, I'm afraid the book itself will be even more so. While this organization promotes clarity and thoroughness, it also invites reiteration of the obvious and the predictable. The book, bearing too many traces of its origin as the author's doctoral thesis at Oxford University, is reader unfriendly. Even more unfortunate is the glaring inconsistency between subject matter and form. Holistic education by its very nature distrusts set forms and rigid a priori structures; it has a predilection towards what Romantic poets and philosophers call "organic form" where the nature of the subject matter structures the writing—as Emerson put it, "a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own."

A parallel objection can be made to the book's style. Here's a sample:

> Even though knowledge from experience and knowledge from representations appear to be the same on the basis of their contents (e.g., how to sail a boat from experience or from books) the Authors stated or implied that knowledge which originates in life can move to abstractions or concepts and then easily find application in experience again; whereas knowledge acquired from abstractions is difficult to apply to life, tending to remain only as abstractions. (pp. 30-31)

The syntax of this long sentence is cumbersome, but more importantly its own language, polysyllabic and Latinate, is abstract; the only specific is the mention of sailing a boat. In other words, the book's style is at odds with the concrete actualities that it rightly claims as the foundation of holistic education. Similarly, Dr. Forbes himself has spent thirty years in holistic education, including teaching and administering at the Krishnamurti Educational Centre in England for twenty of these years. Yet I know this only from the biographical sketch at the end of the book. Virtually none of his own experience enters into his philosophic and sociological disquisitions to lend texture and immediacy. In writing this book he perpetuates the very separations of the specific and the general, the personal and the cultural, the immediate and the conceptual that holistic education is supposed to unify and transcend.

It is true that some specific context is provided by the autobiographical sketches of the six Authors. But these sketches appear as the first section of their respective chapters, with only rare and somewhat tangential connections made between the lives and ideas. I also have serious reservations about the selection of the Authors. The fairest and most honest way for me to approach this particular issue is to reveal that I am the author of a similar attempt at historical and philosophical synthesis, *Minding American Education* (Bickman 2003) published at the same time as this book. As an Americanist, I focus on movements such as Transcendentalism and Pragmatism, and figures such as Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, William James, and John Holt. I have to be careful not to fault Forbes for not writing my book, and I want to clarify that I am working from a related but different conceptual framework.

My first objection is that Forbes's canon of holistic educators focuses on Great Men—and they are indeed all male—obscuring the larger intellectual and social contexts in which each wrote. For example, all of Forbes's Authors, but particularly Froebel and Jung, worked within the context of the cognitive archetype of unity-division-reintegration, most fully developed by Romantic philosophers and poets. In this vision a primal whole is split, but the fragments retain the desire for later reunification. Often the

growth of the individual and the ability to function in society require a lopsided development of capacities that creates divisions within the individual—splits between thought and feeling—and parallel divisions between the individual and nature, self and society. Art, therapy, and, most importantly for present purposes, education can be modes and media for healing these splits and reunifying the personality. We have to grasp this major current of thought in understanding holistic education lest the tradition itself seem fragmented and disparate.

My second objection is to the particular Authors selected. Every historian is going to have objections to another's tradition, but there is one omission in Forbes's book that shakes my confidence in his entire enterprise, that of John Dewey. Forbes does not explain this omission except at one point to imply that Dewey stresses the community over individual development. But from my perspective, Dewey is the philosopher who provides the soundest and most extensive basis for holistic education. His entire life was committed to reconciling the dualities that beleaguer our existence: the separations between mind and body, contemplation and action, the abstract and the concrete, the community and the individual. He provided not only philosophic solutions to these problems in works such as "The Child and the Curriculum" and *Democracy and Education* but enacted these solutions in his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, one of the best and most extensively documented examples of holistic education. Also ignored are the American followers of Dewey who wrote during that intense period of educational experimentation in the 1960s and 70s, writers such as George Dennison and Herbert Kohl.

So while Forbes' book is valuable, I have the chutzpah to suggest it has to be supplemented by my own work. I may be too harsh on a book whose entire project, philosophy, and intentions I loudly applaud, but this is also the reason for my harshness.

The ideas behind holistic education as so important and so relevant to us at this moment of obsession with paper and pencil testing that they deserve nothing less than the most powerful and accessible presentation. We have to write and think much better than the advocates of mainstream education, precisely because they are the mainstream; they need not persuade teachers and parents to change what they are doing. We, on the other hand, have to use all the resources of language and scholarship to make our case urgent and persuasive.

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The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning

By Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

Published by the Center for Nonviolent Communication, LaCrescenta, CA.

Reviewed by Jeong-eun Rhee

As teachers, how many of us would be able to manage our everyday life without encountering any violence: physical, verbal, emotional, graphic, social, political, direct, indirect? Conflict, aggression, violent issues and problems are part of my regular classroom experiences. As a teacher, I criticize, blame, punish, and give up in dealing with them. Then I become discouraged, disconnected, and discontented. Yet, my work as a teacher still needs to continue. I talk to myself, "This is not why I wanted to be a teacher." I yearn for peaceful, engaging, and compassionate relationships with my students so that both my students and I can grow and flourish through our interactions of learning and teaching.

If any teacher can relate to this through her/his shared experience, *The Compassionate Classroom* is a must-read book. In its beginning, Sura Hart and Victoria Hodson write, "Our greatest desire is to provide teachers with practical tools to help them bring more lively learning and compassion into their classrooms (p. 5)." The authors do a great job in accomplishing their goal.

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The foundation of this book is anchored in Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication program. The program was inspired by Rosenberg's acute realization of the power of language to shape thinking and consciousness particularly through his training in clinical psychology. He also studied various spiritual traditions, paying attention to the language used by people whose lives emanated the love and compassion at the heart of these teachings. From his study, he concluded that creating a peaceful world entails eliminating language that blames, shames, criticizes, and demands and using language that connects us to the heart of human experience – values, desires, and needs (pp. 5-6). Based on this, Rosenberg developed a process of Nonviolent Communication and started the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) for its practice in 1995. This book is an outcome of the CNVC Education Project.

While the book is written as a practical guide particularly for elementary school teachers, I found the book sometimes spiritual, philosophical, and therapeutic, as well as useful for my own college classes. The book explores both how and why questions about "relationship based classrooms" in a quite holistic and engaging way.

The introductory section lays out the philosophical foundation of Nonviolent Communication along with various teachers' narratives. Readers learn that Nonviolent Communication is not only a process of interacting or communicating but also a consciousness of our compassionate nature.

In Section One, Hart and Hodson discuss how classroom relationships impact teaching and learning. The authors' arguments with supporting evidence are that engaged learning only occurs when the needs of teachers and students for physical and emotional safety are met; and relationships in a classroom are essentially the interplay of the needs of the students and needs of the teacher (p. 19). How can teachers meet more of the needs of both students and themselves in classroom? The point is to put relationships at the center of classroom concern.

In Chapter 2, questions are posed for readers to closely and critically examine the four vital relationships in the classroom: a teacher's relationship to herself; a teacher's relationships with her students; students' relationships with each other; and students' relationships with their learning processes and the curriculum. These questions are simple and familiar yet they can be finely tuned into queries similar to the following:

> What is your intention in teaching? How do you think about yourself? How do you see your students? How often do you listen? How often do you speak? What do you do when a student says "No"? How often do your students make decisions about their learning and life in the classroom? To what extent do students learn together and from each other? Do your students have forums to express themselves and to hear others? Do your students know what their interests, talents, and learning styles are? How often do you focus on the interplay of feelings and needs in your curriculum—especially in literature, history, and the sciences? To what extent is the study of human life connected to the community, to all other life forms, the biosphere, and the planet?

The process of answering these questions can simultaneously be both very enlightening and challenging. By reflecting on our own teaching practice and relationships to ourselves, students, and the curriculum, many of us may begin to realize that what we do has more to do with positional habits or job descriptions than our convictions.

While Section One deals with "why" issues about building relationship-based classrooms, Section Two introduces tools for practice. In Chapter 3, Hart and Hodson discuss five premises about human nature, which work as reminders of human capacities of empathy and caring:

- We are all natural givers.
- To meet needs we can become more choiceful about how we think, listen, talk, and act.
- We can continually learn new ways to meet needs.
- By focusing on needs, we can prevent, reduce, and resolve conflicts.

To help teachers get in touch with our own compassionate natures, the book also provides various exercises, examples, and group activities that can be used with our students in the classroom.

Chapter 4 functions like behavior therapy. The reader learns how to speak Nonviolent Communication and

quit using demanding, criticizing, and blaming language. However, the authors never insist that there is one right way to communicate. Instead, they argue, "Intention is 90% of communication." If our intention is to connect with others and ourselves, and to engage in dialogue in order to find a way to meet the needs of all concerned, our words can be a powerful tool to connect us. In terms of techniques, they ask teachers to pay attention to what we observe (not evaluate); how we feel (not judge); what we "really" need; and how we request (not demand). The final chapter in this book provides a collection of activities and games that we can use and adapt to develop better understandings and skills of Nonviolent Communication in the classroom.

While these are very empowering and caring ways to build relationship based classrooms, I am a little cautious to celebrate their approach fully. My biggest concern is: How can teachers engage in these premises and practices without being trapped in the myth of liberal individual meritocracy, which often disguises oppressive social structures? Can all of us really be autonomous decision makers? What if social conditions make it impossible for some people to get their needs met? What do we do with unintentional violence such as unintentional racist beliefs and behaviors? Without addressing the issues of social inequality and inequity, our romance of agency or choice can easily perpetuate the status quo. Throughout heterosexual dominant history, for instance, countless men and women have worked hard to build meaningful and compassionate marriages/relationships. However, without transforming the institution of marriage itself, or in fact eliminating sexism, would an equal relationship between men and women be possible?

Let me reiterate my point with an example. The authors cite "those who fill our prisons because they have hurt or killed another human being (p. 50)" to make their point that they were not really aware of the real human needs that they were trying to meet when they acted as they did. As much as this sounds smooth, legitimate, and empathetic, their discussion loses provocative power—at least for me. However trivial this example is in this book, I keep wondering about the unintentional side effects of this example, considering all the common myths about crime and unjust judicial systems we have in the U.S. (Alessio 1996; Davis 1997). Why not use as an example those CEOs who make 500 times the salary of average workers and still are willing to break all those human rights and environmental regulations to make even more profits (Sklar, Mykyta, and Wefald 2001)? What does each of us "really" need? In a society like the U.S. where most of us are socialized (wrongly) to believe that everyone has an equal chance, romanticizing choice without a clear understanding of our unequal reality may harm our social consciousness.

Hart and Hudson acknowledge that larger structural and systematic issues do shape what goes inside classroom. They even criticize how our current school system forces what teachers teach and students learn through policies and rules made by politicians and administrators. "Coercion in any form undermines the emotional safety necessary for students to learn and for teachers to teach (p. 11)." However, they emphasize that the focus of their book is not how we can change the system but what teachers can do in the classroom. They reason that by practicing Nonviolent Communication and tending relationships in classrooms, teachers become powerful agents of change within the system. I support their individual approach but only if teachers have a critical awareness of social justice and inequality. The authors write that "when these issues are addressed by the entire school community, we *will* find ways to change the system (p. 11)." Yet, why can't we focus simultaneously on our relationships and structural transformation in this process? In this gentle demarcation between the individual and the larger system, I as an anti-oppression educator become ambivalent.

In all, the book is still empowering, engaging, and practical. There is no doubt that our school systems do not encourage students and teachers to grow together and to become "caring" human beings for all forms of life on the planet. The ultimate purpose of "The Compassionate Classroom" is to break the cycle of violence and transform *it* into compassion. I say "Count me in!"

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