The Wheels of Soul in Education

An Inspiring International Dynamic

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This book boldly re-frames the basis of our collective approach to education. It presents a compelling argument for an educational world-view that perceives self, society and the universe as an undivided whole—a holarchy of wholes within wholes, wheels within wheels. Soul in education is an international movement rooted in the holistic education paradigm. It challenges us, individually and collectively, to re-ensouel our educational thinking and practice from the inside out. At the heart of this educational world-view is an appreciation of the spiritual presence of the soul as the source self that exists beyond the surface appearance of personality and infuses an individual with positive, transformative qualities that energise lifelong learning and creative living. The essays in this book describe practices that attend to the cultivation of the soul in a range of educational contexts. Written by holistic educators from around the globe, they build a picture of education that develops a multidimensional understanding of self and other. Through creativity, paradox and mystery teachers invite the emergence of soul qualities in themselves and learners: qualities such as joy, justice, caring, ethics, compassion and tolerance—providing the vital basis for the creation of a more equitable social reality in the 21st century and beyond.

“Many souls have joined together to create this wonderful book. Here is a work which looks at and listens to different faces and facets of the soul as it emerges in the educational context. Soul is an ageless force, a riddle layered with meaning and an idea distributed across time and place. These pages suggest that education can harness the resources of vast stretches of an inner landscape through which we all travel. Here is a book that opens doors to pathways of the heart.” - Trevor Mepham, Principal, The Steiner Academy Hereford, UK.

“Rarely are we, the reader, gifted with a book which inspires the deeper levels of our being and beckons us towards a better, more intelligent and sane way of living. This book does just that! Not only are we provided with a visionary theory, but also given practical demonstrations of that theory, which enable us to rest assured of its validity. Soul education is applied to many aspects of being human – the teaching relationship, the training of counsellors, the time of pregnancy and birth – all moments of poignant aliveness. This book re-animates the importance of values and the place of meaning in the human experience as well as providing us with an understanding of how to live them.” - Diana Whitmore, Chief Executive, Children: Our Ultimate Investment.
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DEDICATION

For all the soulful pioneers, educators, students and others who attended the world conferences and symposia on Soul in Education beginning with the first conference at Findhorn, Scotland in October 2000. This work honours you.

To the memory of four soul educators who have left their legacy in this work—Dawn Griggs (1945–2004), Marilyn Feldberg (1942–2007), Rachael Kessler (1946–2010) and Deanne Lawrance (1938–2010).

And to Mr. Lee (John Harvey) who makes it all real.
The soul is a timeless universal concept referring to that deep, integrating aspect of humanity, which embodies our highest qualities and life energies and, when consciously connected to our lives, gives a strong sense of meaning, caring connectedness, purpose and direction.

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FOREWORD

“Affairs are now soul size”, wrote Christopher Fry in his drama The Sleep of Prisoners and one only has to pick up a daily newspaper to appreciate that this is so. The many social, ecological and economic challenges of today are calling for a wisdom of response that only soul-connected people are in a position to give. Yet most children and young people still receive an education that does not nurture the wisdom that they will need to make such measured choices.

Most education seems to fit the young for earning a living, yet fails to equip them for living a life of awareness, of feeling, of character, of joy, energy, appreciation, acceptance and love. Such are the qualities of soul that are innate in the newborn and very young, but flourish only if nourished by parents, teachers and significant others. Yet how might these people offer to the young the riches of their own souls if they have not yet had the opportunity to open to them themselves? No wonder that the National Commission on Children at Risk (USA) in 2003 found that, “Denying the spiritual needs of adolescents may end up creating a void within lives that either devolves into depression or is filled by other forms of questing and challenge, such as drinking, unbridled consumerism, petty crimes, sexual precocity and flirtations with violence”.

Recently I attended a lecture entitled, “The Soul of Humanity evolves through Planetary Crisis”, that emphasised the growing sense I already had that it was now a matter of some urgency that somehow—as individuals, as nations and as one humanity—we discover and express our deeper souls within. Soul is a word with many connotations. At one time, it was associated with religious and cultural contexts but today it is increasingly being acknowledged as the more profound or essential nature of the deeper self that nourishes us and connects us with something beyond our immediate personality selves. We can sense the soul animating energy within us: “The force that through the green fuse of the flower, powers my green age” as the poet Dylan Thomas expressed it.

This timeless self truly powers us from deep within. It contracts in unloving situations yet expands in response to loving experiences when it can irradiate the personality, bringing a deep inner glow that kindles the sparks of inspiration, imagination and creativity that might otherwise have lain dormant within. The late Anita Roddick, founder and CEO of The Body Shop, was clearly inspired from the level of her soul. Just before her recent, sudden death she wrote of how she had tried to use retailing as a lever to change the world and advised that we would succeed or fail in creating the changes needed according to how much imagination is in circulation. She saw imagination as a kind of currency kindled through connection and good conversation. This kindling of a soul-inspired imagination too infrequently occurs in contemporary learning contexts. Instead, as Dr Martin Luther King
pointed out, our society is based on judging success by the index of our salaries and the size of our automobiles rather than by the quality of our service and our relationship to humanity. So often, it seems that teachers feel obliged to abandon a qualitative approach to their teaching in favour of meeting the needs of a system of assessment that judges achievement and growth by mere quantitative measurement. Children and young people know this.

My own youngest daughter cried herself to sleep for three weeks after entering secondary school saying, “Mummy, the teachers don’t see me; they just want to open my head and stuff facts in.” She knew that her inner feelings and perceptions were just as important as her intellectual understanding but that “the teachers don’t know anything”—nothing, that is, that she felt really mattered.

This book is a sign that some teachers do know, do care and do have the courage—the heart—to risk their knowing being criticised by others, for they themselves are in touch with a consciousness that includes and transcends the everyday levels of awareness and perception. These educators have risen above the ever-lurking ‘gorgon’ with its triple heads of separativeness, selfishness and materialism, and are prepared to work with enlightened example. Perhaps the first modern educator to share this knowing was Rudolph Steiner who, early in the nineteenth century, originated the Waldorf School curriculum, which is now offered worldwide in well over 70 countries. Steiner trained teachers to know that their primary role is to nurture the soul development of each child and meet his/her needs as a whole human being—body, mind, soul and spirit.

Maria Montessori was another significant voice who stressed that education is a natural process carried out by the human individual himself/herself. She underscored that the work of the teacher is to witness and support the unfolding of the human soul. Others that have inspired me include Paulo Freire, Joseph Chiltern Pearce and Jack Miller, who contributes to this book and bravely set up a Centre for Holistic Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, a premier mainstream university in Canada.

Today the number is growing of those contributing vision and dedication to this great turning of the wheel and there seems to be underway a shift—as huge as the agricultural revolution, which took thousands of years, and the industrial revolution that took several hundred. The current shift, happening in only tens of years and aided by the accompanying cyber revolution is rather more a shift of awareness to a new mindset and a consequent new way of living and being. Just as in the time of Ptolemy, when the earth was seen as the centre of the universe, and later when Copernicus pioneered the realisation that the sun, not the earth, was the centre, so today, there are pioneers in every field awakening to exploring the realisation that the centre of the universe is within ourselves; and that the observed universe ‘out there’ cannot be separated from the subjective experience of the universe ‘in here’.

This shift can be seen as a collective awakening to the oneness underlying the rich diversity of outer forms and the essential interconnectedness of all that is. It can first emerge as a growing awareness of our place in the web of life or as a sense that my neighbour and I are one. This message has been conveyed by all the great teachers of the past and, more recently, proven by quantum physics. Now this
awareness is growing like a great wave of connection. And it is the soul within us that first perceives this connection and awakens the intuition from which our inspiration flows and counterbalances the rational mind. It is the soul that kindles our hearts of love and gives us the courage to honour our inner promptings and live in an authentic and congruent way.

It takes courage to live in a soul connected way. Those working in mainstream schools, colleges, hospitals or business to bring an awareness of this dimension to others are most likely to have experienced, at best, being ignored or ridiculed or, at worst, persecuted or punished. It seems that it was ever thus. Each generation seems to have misunderstood those who have moved a little ahead of the rest and try to bring in the insights, values and visions of a new tomorrow. This tomorrow will soon be today and today’s ‘heretics’ will eventually be written into the history books as the heroes of humanity.

Friends and colleagues may well see the contributors to this book as heretical in the perspectives that they offer. Yet they know that education has a pivotal role to play in creating a future that has kindness and compassion at its heart and brings the inspiration and courage to the souls of others, young and old, to break through the double glazing of contemporary consumerism, grow beyond the limitations and constraints that are so often imposed by others and fulfil the soul purpose for which they are born. Doubtless, according to the metaphor of the transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly, the ‘imaginal cells’ within the liquid mush of the chrysalis, are, at first, rejected by the old caterpillar cells that remain. Nevertheless, as they move towards other imaginal cells they create in a self-organised way the imaginal buds that eventually, when connected together, emerge as a wondrous butterfly. Emergence is what is happening at this time. We cannot know what the eventual butterfly will look like but let us, for a moment, imagine education at every level incorporating the spiritual dimension of each aspect of the curriculum. Let us imagine our children growing up without the bombarding pressures of commerce, encouraged to connect with their own soul purpose and free to play out a true childhood of beauty, fun and creativity. Imagine that they grow up with a sense of community with their neighbours and with the whole earth.

This book is like an ‘imaginal bud’ contributing to the new era that is emerging. Sharing is one way that what is emerging within us can be acknowledged and affirmed. My own contribution to this process has included co-authoring a book *The Quest: exploring a sense of Soul* (O-Books, 2005), which offers an interactive learning journey for readers to discover and share what is growing within them. Another current contribution is working on the development in the UK of the Wrekin Forum. This has sprung out of the original work of Sir George Trevelyan Bt who, in the nineteen seventies and eighties, pioneered the kind of adult spiritual education, which has empowered some of the parents, teachers and leaders of today to work with the courage of their convictions. Doubtless, such groupings are growing in many countries at the same time. The Wrekin Forum is bringing together individuals and groups to support deeper spiritual connection. It seems to be that it is through developing deeper connection that the imaginal cells in the dark of the chrysalis recognise and cluster together with each other. So is it with ourselves.
Establishing trust in soul-centred relationships is what will bring communities and nations together in a unified way. I rejoice in the inspirations of the contributors to this book and the emergence of a new soul awakened future that they have to offer. They are shining as island peaks in a sea not yet fully tinged with soul. My hope is that each of you reading this may discover and follow your own soul’s deeper calling. You may not yet see the colours of the emergent twenty-first century ‘butterfly’ of which you, too, are a part; but through you—in ways you can’t yet know—a new world is being born. This is the true adventure of our time.

Janice Dolley
Gloucestershire
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INTRODUCTION

New Views on Soul in Education

The time has come for educators to recognize and foster the wholeness of the learner. Teaching and learning involves more than a consumerist approach to education offering students information related to a subject area but involves, above all, the inner development of the learner. Tomorrow’s world is waiting for whole people to guide and nurture the vision of a social network of whole people where soul is valued as a guiding principle in human action and human relations. The twin wheel of learning involves inner and outer modes of learning that, in time, can awaken the learner’s spiritual antennae helping each individual to recognize and realize the whole of her/his potential. Soul learning is a multidimensional mode of learning in which the individual is immersed in personal, social, emotional, environmental, creative and spiritual levels of awareness. These intelligences form the spectrum of spiritual intelligence, which advances holistic modes of thinking. Educators who are aware of and are ready to work with the multidimensional aspects of the learner—body, mind, emotions and soul—can begin the task of bringing soul into the work of education.

In this book, we speak of soul as that aspect of the whole self that unites our human and divine nature. When we speak of soul in education, we are advancing the notion of soul as a reality, which needs our attention. Soul education includes a spiritual level of awareness. This awareness represents authentic ways of learning from the inside out. It is an awareness that helps learners develop ways to learn, to be and to do based on personal meaning and connection. It is learning that over time develops the subtle yet important qualities of soul that enhance and guide the faculty of intelligence. Ramon Gallegos Nava (2000) describes a multilevel vision of education as an integrative pedagogy.

In a multilevel vision of education, we begin to integrate different pedagogies into a global map. This allows us to see with clarity the fact that education has at least five levels and that these rest in a deep level of awareness and experience that is kosmic or spiritual and which is fundamental to all genuine education. The spiritual level is inclusive of the individual, community, social and environmental levels, but the spiritual level itself is not included in the four lower levels of awareness and experience. For this reason, the holistic educator always keeps the spiritual level in mind when working at any other level. (http://www.hent.org/world/rgn/levels.htm)
The essays in this book define and give a place to the role of soul in diverse educational settings that create a space where spirit is valued as an essential aspect of the human dynamic. The educators whose work appears in this book are not necessarily identified with any particular religious philosophy or spiritual practice although some of the ideas in their work are contained in religious and spiritual practices from many world cultures and religions. The paradigm of soul in education as described in these essays finds its guiding philosophy in perennial philosophy, which states that within reality and the universe there is interconnectedness and a fundamental unity to which each individual has intimate connection through the inner, higher Self. This holonomic construct of interconnectedness resonates with the ancient image of wholeness of Indra’s heaven.

In Indra’s Heaven, there is a network of pearls so arranged that if you look in one you see all the others reflected in it and if you move into any part of it you set off all the bells that ring through every part of the network, through every part of reality. (Houston, 1987, p. 188)

When we can speak of spirit and soul within the context of education and perceive these as integral aspects of being human, we will arrive at a transformational threshold in the human journey. This doorway allows more human beings to more readily realise the truth of their interconnectedness. It is the recognition of this holistic worldview that fosters deeper levels of sensitivity, empathy, caring and compassion, and on a practical level, supports us in being more active in promoting social and educational modes that counter injustice and address the true state of human suffering. The realisation of our interconnectedness relieves us of the devastating effects of greed and glamour and moves us to honour the soul in each person.

Soul education has deep roots in theosophical and humanistic traditions. These time-honoured traditions recognise and remind us of the fundamental existence of a higher Self or Soul. The philosopher Ken Wilber (2000) offers us an elegant map of consciousness he names AQAL (All Quadrants, All Levels) in which the higher Self occupies the centre plane of being. This centre is perceived as a guide for the human personality leading it to experience more soulful, transcendental thought (Wilber, 2000a, p. 204). Wilber echoes the work of the theosophist Alice Bailey as he explains that we are developing a science of the human being, a science of mind that recognises the presence of soul expressed as spiritual intelligence. Wilber names this spectrum of intelligence second tier thinking. This mode of thought is holistic and includes the dimension of the imagination and of spirit. These ideas are represented in holistic movements found in areas such as education, sociology, alternative medicine, humanistic psychology, ecology, quantum physics, and scientific inquiry. The holistic education and spirituality movement, the Deep Ecology work pioneered by Joanna Macy, Arne Naess and John Seed, the emerging theory of cultural creatives developed by sociologist Paul Ray and psychologist Sherry Anderson and the consciousness work of Charles Tart in advancing state-specific science are some good examples of how ideas that include a spiritual perspective have become embodied in the fabric of modern inquiry and thought.
The integral model of spiral dynamics, a management theory based on the spiral of social values developed by psychologist Clare Graves and expanded by Don Beck (1996) best describes the spiral of consciousness governing the inter-relationship between the personal and social dynamics of change, action and transformation. Spiral dynamics posits that human consciousness has begun to move towards a second tier level of thinking, which includes new modes of awakening in consciousness represented by the colour memes, yellow (systemic wholeness) and turquoise (holistic), in which the personal self is guided by a more integrative spiritual will. When we reach this state of awareness, we can perceive issues and problems from the same perspective as visionaries like Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King. In these holistic modes of perceiving and doing, we understand the way the part belongs to the whole and value the truth of our interconnectedness. This integrative process of the psyche, Abraham Maslow (1962) named re-sacralisation. Hence, a holistically tuned consciousness is aware of the sacred, of the soul rooted in reality and works with this perspective in mind.

The integral map of consciousness, as drawn by Wilber, suggests that learning is transpersonal and integral. In the west, the psychological work expressed in this map is found in the groundbreaking work of C. G. Jung, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Roberto Assagioli, who perceived consciousness as an evolving principle in human beings and human relations. Assagioli’s Psychosynthesis model (1965/1971) was the first western map of consciousness to name the Soul as the guiding point of our higher Self. Assagioli’s so called egg diagram attests to the presence of an overarching intelligence that is dynamic, holistic and integrative—the Soul. As Gallegos Nava (2000), among others explains, this spiritual intelligence guides and contains all other dynamic intelligences such as intellectual, social and emotional intelligences.

THE CALL OF THE SOUL

The Soul is the source of our creative imagination and intuition. James Hillman (1997) envisions the soul as the essential, innate image of self that calls us into being much like the acorn holding the potential to become an oak. In his “acorn theory” or entelechy, Aristotle, explains that, “each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived” (p. 6). In this view, the soul represents the source of our calling, the spiritual energy shaping our character. Reconnecting with the soul’s guidance and calling is not a process or a development, but an awakening, a form of remembering (Hillman, 1997, p. 6).

When we hear the call of the soul we begin to grow into the shape of our original essence, what Thomas Moore (2000) calls the “original Self”. The call of the soul is a spiralling journey in which the ego and the higher Self learn to make contact in order to receive the soul’s wisdom and guidance. Moore (2000) writes: “Maybe at root we are coils of possibility in constant rotation...Maybe in life we never really develop, but only expand the rotations that give us our firm identity” (p. 63). In other words, as it remembers the source of its essence, the authentic self
propels us into wanting to embody more of this essential self. As we shift our locus of perception away from our separate ego self towards the soul, we cultivate the holistic perspective of the authentic Self and more readily engage feelings of justice, empathy, altruism and caring.

As we look around us, and pay close attention, we will uncover a huge spiritual hunger in our young and within the folds of our modern culture that is often misunderstood and misrepresented. Denise O’Leary who with neuroscientist Mario Beauregard authored *The Spiritual Brain: A neuroscientist’s case for the existence of the soul* (2007) writes that “secularism has not succeeded in replacing transcendent commitments; indeed secularism is more vulnerable than most habits of thought to a destructive post-modernism in which no ethical standards can be confidently asserted” (p. 4, St. Michael’s Magazine).

The field of education holds the key to reversing this untenable position. Education as perceived and presented by soul educators is a holistic experience for both learner and educator. It is an experience of awakening to the authentic self and the soul. This is a new idea in our time—that educators who are themselves working on awakening their spiritual antennae can influence the spiritual awakening of their students. This kind of education is authentic, inspiring and transformative. It includes and values the soul of the learner and the teacher and is not premised on ego value. As long as the personal ego/self perceives itself separate from its higher sources (i.e. the authentic Self, the Soul), it seeks to protect its vulnerability through feelings of judgment, low self-esteem and despair. Jack Miller (1994) writes, “The ego is the source of our sense of separateness. And thus by gradually letting go of ego, we connect to others and the universe in a more direct and compassionate way” (p. 27). Contact with the spiritual energies of the higher Self, which is the reflecting point of the soul, choreographs new possibilities for developing wholeness through feelings of empathy, caring, self-love and hope.

Awakening our creative senses and sensibilities empowers us to make informed choices about our life and work. This notion is at the heart of soul in education practice. Nonetheless when we speak of soul in relation to education, we are placed in the position of having to define and clarify what we mean by soul in a context in which it is not usually found. We may begin with the ideas of Rudolph Steiner, the Austrian-born educator, who in the twentieth century originated the Waldorf school curricula. Steiner (1974) believed that a child is a soul learning to become a human being. What does this mean? To those educators who understand the principle of awakening to the soul and its guidance, it means that we are educating the divine and human aspect of the learner. It means that as educators, we are as aware of the growth of the learner’s intellectual and emotional self as we are of the presence of spiritual self. These are complementary aspects of the learning experience. Steiner (1974) encourages teachers to always keep in mind that the child is a human-in-becoming and, as such, that the child is first and foremost a soul. He reminds us that the education of souls moves from the abstract to the concrete, a spiralling process that can take a lifetime. The child, in this view, is an ensouled being who needs to develop a conscious knowledge of the soul and its qualities. Steiner sees
holistic education as a way for the self to re-awaken to the guidance of the soul. This awakening is, moreover, a fundamental longing of the human spirit; a remembering of our spiritual origins. He writes:

…it is easy to be a grown up person—easy for the spirit...for the body has then been made ready, it no longer offers the same resistance...but it is extremely difficult to be a child. The child himself is not aware of this because his consciousness is not yet awake...the child comes down to earth; before this he had been accustomed to a spiritual substance from which he drew his spiritual life... the soul nature that came down from the spiritual world is very strong in us, and it’s clumsy at first because it has to become accustomed to external nature. (p. 21–23)

This perspective suggests that the soul develops its talents and gifts through the development of body mind/emotions and intellect, which can be seen as the timebound workshop of the timeless soul. Soul in education holds the view that as we include the spirit aspect in education we are creating the science and the art of learning. Steiner writes:

But today no one knows how to speak of these realities of the soul in the same way as he can of the realities of the body, so that teachers and children are quite helpless... But as there is no science of the soul the teacher is unable to speak about the human soul as the modern physician can of the human body. And as for the spirit, there is no such thing! One cannot speak of it; there are no longer even any words for it. There is but the single word ‘spirit’ and that does not convey very much. (p. 15)

A colleague of Steiner, the theosophical teacher and author, Alice Bailey (1974) wrote about the science of the soul as a principle guiding new forms of education. The soul, seated in the body is immersed in substance, is the sentient principle underlying all forms. The soul, for Bailey (1974) “is the principle of the intelligent, embodied love of the creating spirit. It is the principle of intelligence that characterises mental awareness. It is neither spirit nor matter, but is the relation between them...it is the form building aspect of Spirit, the attractive force of the created universe that holds all forms together”. The soul is a unit of light, which mediates between Spirit and form and is “god-conscious, group conscious and self conscious” (pp. 22–27). Its “self-conscious aspect” is found in the “appearance of a human being”. Bailey describes the relationship between Soul and Self.

The Soul may be regarded as the unified sentiency and relative awareness which lies back of the form of a planet or solar system...it is...one Soul that is functioning, acting through vehicles of various capacities...in just the same sense as a man is one identity, working sometimes through a physical body and sometimes through a feeling body or a mental body, and sometimes knowing himself to be the Self... (p. 27)

Alice Bailey and Rudolf Steiner’s theosophical ideas bridge Eastern and Western mystical traditions. Both interpret the nature of the soul as a creative principle through which Spirit is embodied in the personality. Soul is the creative, coherent
presence of Spirit and its will and gives form to the human being. Soul mediates, co-ordinates, integrates, unifies, aligns and organises consciousness and beingness. Spirit, in this model, represents the cosmic energy field in relationship with the creative function of the Soul. The Soul enters human consciousness through the channels of the higher Self—the transpersonal self—and silently guides the incarnated personality (the separate ego) towards self-integration. Armstrong (1985), the author of *The Radiant Child,* offers a useful description of the relationship between soul and the spirit; a harmonious relationship which is expressed by soul in education.

The soul is the bridge between us as separate human beings and a universal background of oneness...It observes, reflects upon, permeates, yet stays apart from the din of our daily lives...the ancients...described the capacity of the soul to transcend body and mind and affirmed its ability to soar off to other worlds and experiences—perhaps to other lifetimes as well. The spirit represents the universal aspect of ourselves: our ultimate identity with the life of the Cosmos. The soul is the core of individuality, while the spirit is the ground of all individual lives and is beyond all lives as well. It is Life itself, infinite, transcendent yet immanent within everything that exists. (p. 67–68)

When awakening educators include the presence of the learner’s soul, soul finds a place in the learning and teaching process. Keeping this idea in mind, we can begin to articulate the meaning of soul in education. In this text, soul in education is described as *timeless learning,* it is *education for wholeness,* for *compassion* for *happiness* for discovering one’s *personal values and meaning* and for practicing various *forms of creativity,* for *practicing ethics* and creating forms of *deep communication and communion* that include transpersonal, intrapersonal, interspecies and perinatal forms of knowing that open us to the transcendent dimensions of being.

**SOUL EDUCATORS**

At this point in time, given the diverse ways of approaching education and its meaning we can begin to speak of *soulful modes* of educating the young. The essays collected here offer a spectrum of ideas that inform the nurturing of the soul in educative settings both formal and informal. This book collects some prominent ideas related to spirituality in education as presented by hundreds of educators and people interested in soul in education at international conferences and symposia. These conferences took place between 2000 and 2005 in Findhorn (Scotland), Hungary, South Africa, Hawaii (USA), Colorado (USA) and Australia and at ongoing local symposia and related conferences in the UK, Netherlands, Italy and Canada and Mexico.

*Soul education* and *soul educators* are new terms emerging within the dynamic of larger public discussions about what we mean by soul in education. The first deep discussion took place at the original world conference in Scotland, aptly named, The Spirit of Learning. Hosted by Mari Hollander and the stewards of the Findhorn Foundation, this first conference gathered educators from around the
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world in the fall of 2000 at Findhorn, Scotland. For seven days we discussed, defined explained, described and shared definitions, approaches and concepts that broadly encompass the meaning of “soul in education” and defined a soul educator. Definitions were many and tentative. The planning group had posed the question: How does a group of people focus a discussion of soul in education when education has become such a material, market driven enterprise? At a time when the post-modern value of education had all but lost its humanistic and spiritual roots, it seemed nothing short of madness to talk of holistic education and of soul in education. Our discussions set into motion the wheels of soul in education as a real and practical possibility that continues to be turned by many people, and includes soul educators around the globe.

I fondly remember the wonderful discussions that took place in all corners of Findhorn, among the focalising group guiding the process for several years. We struggled over the use of the preposition “in” within the phrase Soul in education. For many days, we met to discuss the difference in meaning and intention between the phrases soul education and soul in education. Eventually most of us agreed that although soul education was the goal, we would need to begin by speaking of soul in education if we were to be understood by a larger audience. We ended our discussions by drafting the first Declaration of Soul in Education (see Appendix A), which was further refined in consultation with the UNESCO representative to the conference.

My own involvement had begun in the mid eighties within the holistic education movement revving up in Toronto. In the mid nineties, I became involved in planning and presenting my work at holistic education conferences named Breaking New Ground, sponsored by The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and organised by a team led by Jack Miller. I was further inspired by the courageous vision of small groups of educators living and working on three continents (Europe, North America and Australasia), led by an active UK group, determined to advance a Soul in Education project. In the fall of 2000, one year before the now infamous 9/11 tragedy in New York City, these educators produced the first world conference on soul in education named, The Spirit of Learning in Findhorn, Scotland.

At this stage of the project, Soul in education is a work in progress fostered by committed educators who are willing to engage the soul of the learner as they go about their normal educative duties. The work of more fully defining soul education and its practice is still before us. The latest statement on soul in education, created by a larger group at the Colorado 2005 conference refined the original principles forged in the first Findhorn declaration. This last Statement is a working model with room for change and amplification. (See Appendix B.)

THE WHEELS OF SOUL IN EDUCATION

This is the first published collection of essays outlining elements of theory, practice and aesthetics pertaining to what we mean by soul in education. The underlying thesis in these essays is that human beings benefit from experiencing an education
that includes the soul. The wheels of soul in education turn and spiral with every educator, who, working from the inner dimension of self contributes new insights and practices to the field. In these turbulent but deeply challenging times, there is a great need to nurture the soul alongside the intellect of the young. The soul is the wellspring of wellness, wholeness and the quality of compassion needed in this era of re-alignment and possibility. It is, possibly, our only practical tool for transforming the culture of alienation, materialism and greed. If the young are raised in educational settings that ignore the soul—that essential part of the self that guides our conscience and dreams—we cannot hope to transform violent, joyless unethical ways of living.

Creating a place in education that welcomes the soul allows learners to search for real answers and solutions to their inner conflicts and questions. Soul always invites learners to work towards achieving their full human potential.

In gathering these essays, carefully chosen from among many, Clarence Harvey and I focussed on primary examples of ideas and methods that most immediately define a holistic education framework in which soul and spirit are present. The essays offer readers a range of ideas within the theory, practice and aesthetics that describe the emerging tapestry of soul in education. Holistic educators Jack Miller and Rachael Kessler, both internationally known, write about creating moments of timeless learning and meaningful communication in educational settings that awaken and nurture the soul of learners. Through the cultivation of harmony and compassion, or Ubuntu as described by South African John Benghu, a roadmap can be forged through which the cultural soul of emerging nations such as South Africa and all oppressed people may find its way back to a more soul-infused future.

Benghu writes about equitable educational models based on the eternal principles of Ubuntu. The emergence of soul educators, as described in Clarence Harvey’s paper, is a phenomenon of the times that points to the soul of humanity itself calling us to wake up and change the direction and structure of our educational goals and practice. The soul re-balances and guides ethical behaviour. Mariella Lancia’s insightful essay discusses ethics and the soul in light of the principles of Psychosynthesis originated by Roberto Assagioli where the soul is at the centre of his model of consciousness. We find a further application of the principles of Psychosynthesis in Hava Jónai’s expressive essay on soulful learning as a metaphor of personal integration.

The road towards the future of humanity calls for the cultivation of a listening heart and a clear mind in learners led by teachers who are in the process of awakening. The chief elements of this soul-infused learning allow us to forge happiness, compassion and understanding in the acquisition of practical and spiritual knowledge. From Australia we have Ian Mills who presents a philosophical perspective on soul education as education for happiness and Patricia Sherwood discussing soul education in the practice of social work. Each human being has a personal guiding soul that is embodied before birth. Based in Germany, Aya Nozawa underlines the importance of recognizing the presence of soul as the child grows in the womb.

Aesthetic practices such as art, writing, music and singing invite the imagination and the heart to feel and express the range of human emotions and develop intuition and modes of interconnectedness. The way poetics engages the soul and
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its development is discussed by Germana Giannini (Italy), David Dufty (Australia) and in my own paper on creativity as soul work.

The authors, representing countries on five continents, are at the forefront of soul in education work. They are part of the first wave of an emerging movement that is infusing educational dialogue with the notion of soul and spirituality. These essays are but the beginning of a longer and more fruitful conversation with educators, administrators and learners all over the planet concerned with re-balancing the scales of modern and future education. We acknowledge the ongoing involvement of many soul educators whose work focusses on soul in education practice through yearly retreats, conferences and publications. It is our hope that their work resonates with the heart, mind and spirit of a wider audience who may find their own thoughts reflected in these pages and join the groundswell of interest in soul in education.

REFERENCES


PART I:
THEORIZING A PLACE FOR SOUL IN EDUCATION:
A HOLISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING
AND LEARNING
1. TIMELESS LEARNING

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the concept of timeless learning. It first identifies several characteristics of timeless learning. Some of these characteristics include that it is holistic, connected, embodied, soulful, transformative, non-dualistic, immeasurable, and mysterious. Some examples of these characteristics are also included. The second part of the paper describes basic processes that facilitate timeless learning. These include letting go, attention, contemplation, and compassion. The last part of the paper discusses briefly various programs that are oriented towards timeless learning and includes a brief discussion of Waldorf education, Montessori education and Krishnamurti’s vision of learning.

The child is universal. She has existed in all ages and will continue to be born until the end of time. There is no child of pre-history, of the Middle Ages, no Victorian child, no modern child. There is in reality, only the child of all times, of all races, heir to tradition, hander on of history, crucible of culture, pathway to peace.

–Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori believed the universality of childhood and thus in timeless learning. Timeless learning is simply being totally in the present. This experience is beautifully described by Jay Griffiths:

When it comes to defining time, only the oceanic need apply…the Montaignes or Joyces, Shakespeares or Rousseaus, Eastern Philosophers or children. They know their now, they know the really wild vibe of the present is this; now is the only time when the moment can meet the eternal—and they know that moment is momentous. (1999, p. 36)

Like Montessori, Griffiths suggests that children live outside of conventional time. In this chapter, I would like to examine the nature of timeless learning, suggest some basic learning processes that facilitate this form of education and identify programs that explicitly try to nurture timeless learning.

Most of us have had the experience of the timeless moment. We feel we are in unbounded space. It is in timeless moments when powerful learning occurs. The way that Helen Keller first learned hand sign language from her teacher, Annie Sullivan, is an example of timeless learning. “Annie put Helen’s hand under the water coming from the pump and at the same time her fingers tapped out the word ‘water’. In that one moment the world opened to Helen” (Lash, 1980, p. 54).
In timeless learning, our experience becomes much more immediate. We are not thinking of the past or the future. Wittgenstein said, “Only the man who lives not in time but in the present is happy” (cited in Griffiths, p. 33). One of the teachers in my class commented that after practicing being more in the moment the students told her that she seemed happier.

As a teacher, I have become more aware of my students and their feelings in the class. Instead of rushing through the day’s events, I take the time to enjoy our day’s experiences and opportune moments. The students have commented that I seem happier. I do tend to laugh more and I think it is because I am more aware, alert and “present,” instead of thinking about what I still need to do. (Miller, 1995, p. 22)

Let’s turn now to examining the characteristics of timeless learning.

**Timeless Learning: Characteristics**

Timeless learning is multidimensional and includes a variety of characteristics. Although specific experience of timeless learning would not necessarily include all of the characteristics outlined below, these characteristics are most often linked with timeless learning.

**Holistic/Integrative.** Timeless learning is not limited to the intellect; it is also connected to the emotions, the body and soul/spirit. Soul/spirit is defined here as a vital, mysterious energy that can give meaning and purpose to our lives. Timeless learning recognises that all these elements are linked interdependently. For example, if I have an insight or idea it can quicken the heartbeat that again affects the rhythms in the body.

Timeless learning is integrative in that it tends to link the different parts of ourselves. Too often, we compartmentalise learning into different aspects such as the intellect and the physical and they are left separate. Gandhi (1980) believed that physical, intellectual, and spiritual constituted an “indivisible whole”. “According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another” (p. 138). The tragedy of modern education is that it has ignored Gandhi’s insight and has tried to educate the intellect while ignoring the physical and spiritual needs of the person.

**Connected.** Timeless learning connects. First, there is the connection to various aspects of ourselves (e.g. intellect, emotions, soul, and body) that involves the integrative dimension that was mentioned earlier. Second, there is the connection to others. In timeless learning, the sense of separate self tends to lessen and we see ourselves in relationship to others. A natural sense of compassion arises as we realise how other beings desire much of what we desire (e.g. health and happiness). Connecting to others leads to a communion and community. Communion occurs when the souls of two people connect with each other. Community involves more than just two people experiencing connection to a much larger group.
Another connection that can arise is our link to the earth. Timeless learning often leads to a sense of how we are supported and nourished by the earth. Indigenous people have felt this connection and reading their literature can help restore the connection in ourselves. Finally, timeless learning connects us to the cosmos as a whole. This last connection can deepen our connection to the mystery of being in the universe.

**Embodied.** Timeless learning does not just remain in the head; it becomes embodied. This aspect is related to the integration just described in that the person begins to live what is learned. What many people find so inspiring about Gandhi and Martin Luther King is the way they embodied their own teachings. They were living examples of nonviolent action and protest. Taylor Branch (2006) at the end of his three-volume biography of King writes:

> King himself upheld nonviolence until he was nearly alone among colleagues weary of sacrifice. To the end, he resisted incitements to violence, cynicism, and tribal retreat. He grasped freedom seen and unseen, rooted in ecumenical faith, sustaining patriotism to brighten the heritage of his country for all people. (p. 771)

Because King and Gandhi embodied their teachings so deeply they moved millions of people to follow the path of non-violence.

Teachers can embody qualities that are conducive to timeless learning such as caring, mindful presence, and conveying a sense of respect to the student. Carl Rogers (1969) identified some of these characteristics in his work as he identified empathy, respect, and genuineness as key factors in the success of teachers. Embodiment does not mean sainthood or striving to be perfect. Rather there is simply the desire to live in a way that is congruent with our expressed beliefs. It is this congruency that leads to embodiment.

**Soulful.** Timeless learning reaches that part of ourselves that Emerson and more recently, Thomas Moore have called soul. Soul is defined as a vital and mysterious energy that can give meaning and purpose in life. Timeless learning usually connects with soul and can give the student a deeper awareness of his or her place in the larger scheme of things. How does this happen? Sometimes it can happen through the presence of the teacher, which somehow connects with the student’s soul. Emerson (1990) wrote:

> The spirit only can teach...The man on whom the soul descends, through whom the soul speaks, alone can teach. Courage, piety, love, wisdom, can teach; and everyman can open his door to these angels and they shall bring him the gift of tongues. But the man who aims to speak as books enable, as synods use, as the fashion guides, and interest commands, babbles. Let him hush. (p. 114)

Unfortunately, the “fashion” that guides education today is accountability, which has led to an education that is soulless. Elizabeth Peabody, a colleague of Emerson wrote that, “Education depends on its attitude towards the soul.” Our attitude today has simply been to ignore or deny soul.
Transformative. Timeless learning can lead to profound change in the individual. John Gerber offers the following definition: “Transformative learning (for me) is a process of personal and community growth toward a state of egolessness and communion” (Zajonc, 2003, p. 16). Gerber emphasises how timeless learning leads toward the connectedness described earlier. Although timeless learning can be transformative, there is certainly no guarantee when, how, or under what conditions the transformation will occur. Some transformation can be incremental other changes can be monumental.

One of my favourite examples of transformation comes from Satish Kumar. Kumar has spent much of his life walking. His first walk was a half way around the world for peace. He describes the experience and transformation that occurred:

In wandering, I felt a sense of union with the whole sky, the infinite earth and sea. I felt myself a part of the cosmic existence. It was as if by walking I was making love to the earth itself. Wandering was my path, my true self, my true being. It released my soul-force; it brought me in relation to everything else. (1999, p. 100)

Transformation can also come through suffering. Thomas Moore (2002) makes the point that the spiritual teachers that he trusts are people who have often dealt with difficulty in their lives. He says, “Some of the best priests I know are homosexual; they have struggled with themselves in a fearful, phobic and unaccepting culture” (p. 78).

Flow. Timeless learning is often characterised by what Csikszentmihalyi has called the flow experience. Flow occurs when a person becomes fully immersed in an experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) gives some examples of flow: “gardening, listening to music, bowling, cooking a good meal. It occurs when driving, when talking to friends, and surprisingly often at work” (p. 33–4). It is interesting how Csikszentmihalyi describes the experience: “Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted: hours seem to pass by in minutes” (p. 31). And thus he makes the direct link to timeless learning. Csikszentmihalyi states that the state of flow is also optimal for learning. The state of awareness that arises in flow helps the individual in acquiring new perspectives and skills.

Participatory. Timeless learning often occurs in a context where we are participating in the co-creation of knowledge. Ferrer (2002) makes this point: “participatory refers to the role the individual consciousness plays during transpersonal events. This relation is not one of appropriation, possession, or passive representation of knowledge, but of communion and co-creative participation” (p. 121). Ferrer makes the point that knowing in this way is not restricted to individual experience. It is profoundly relational.

Participatory can also be explained by referring to Buber’s famous I-thou relationship where two or more people encounter one another in an open and free manner. There is no attempt to control the relationship or activity that occurs within the relationship.
Satish Kumar (1999), in encountering another individual, seeks the “door” of mutuality even in the most difficult of relationships. One of his teachers explains: “Like that, when I meet a landlord, he has many faults and shortcomings, and his egotism is like a wall. But he has a little door. If you are prepared to find this door, it means you have risen above your own egotism and you enter his heart” (p. 53).

Non-dualistic. Timeless learning tends to be non-dualistic where the knower and known become one. Emerson wrote, “A painter told me that nobody could draw a tree without in some sort becoming a tree”. He adds, “By deeper apprehension… the artist attains the power of awakening other souls to a given activity” (p. 134). For Emerson, non-dual knowing can awaken others. Non-dual knowing is also called contemplation. In contemplation we do not just reflect on something we merge with the object of contemplation. In timeless learning, we find the barrier between ourselves and the world disappearing as distinctions, such as inner and outer, drop away.

In timeless learning, we tend to move back and forth between both forms; and it is not a matter of clinging to one (non-dualism) and rejecting the other (dualism) but working with both. Dualistic forms of knowing such as reflecting on an experience can allow for assimilation of contemplative experiences.

Mystery. Timeless learning participates in the grand Mystery of being and the cosmos. There is always some unexplainable and mysterious element to timeless learning that can leave us with a sense of awe and wonder. The awareness of the Mystery can lead to a deep sense of humility, which can sometimes be lacking in professors, teachers and academics. A professor who admits to not knowing is looking for trouble; this runs counter to what is expected of academia. Yet when we encounter this quality how refreshing it can be.

Wisdom can arise from recognizing the mystery. Abraham Heschel (1972) wrote:

A return to reverence is the first prerequisite for a revival of wisdom...
Wisdom comes from awe rather than from shrewdness. It is evoked not in moments of calculation but in moments of being in rapport with the mystery of reality. The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe. (p. 72)

Immeasurable. Emerson wrote that, “the results of life are uncalculable and uncalculable” (p. 238). This statement will not please those today obsessed with accountability and testing. Timeless learning cannot be easily measured and certainly not in the short term. Emerson adds: “The years teach much which the days never know” (p. 238). We can try to assess the effects of timeless learning as we reflect on our lives. Techniques such as journal writing, narrative and autobiography may help here. We certainly should not succumb to try reducing the outcomes of timeless learning to conventional research methodologies. Braud and Anderson (1998) have provided an alternative to the empirical model in their recent work. Techniques such as imagery, art, and what is called “integral inquiry” are suggested as alternatives.
Processes of Timeless Learning

How can we bring timeless learning into education? I believe there are four primary processes for doing this:

**Developing attention.** It was noted in the section on flow that timeless learning arises when we are deeply attentive. We can develop attention as a practice through meditation and mindfulness activities, which simply require us to be present in the moment. As television and computer games tend to develop limited attention spans, being mindful can be a real challenge. Deborah Rozman (1976), Gina Levete (1995) and I (2006) have each outlined different activities that can be used in the classroom to develop students’ ability to focus. Rozman suggests the following activity for elementary school children:

Another concentration exercise consists of concentrating on the second hand of a watch or clock as it circles around. Every time a thought enters, let it flow by, don’t let it carry you away from your point of concentration. Each thought is like a fishhook trying to catch you, the fish. See how long you can concentrate without getting hooked into thinking about something else. (p. 102)

**Letting go.** Attention does not mean clinging. Yes, we are present but as events move on it is important to let go of past experience so we continue to be in the present. This allows learning to be more immediate and powerful. Thoreau makes the same point in a manner directly related to education when he said: “It is only when we forget our learning that we begin to know. I do not get nearer by a hair’s breadth to any natural object so long as I presume that I have an introduction to it from some learned man. To conceive of it with a total apprehension, I must for the thousandth time approach it as something totally strange. If you would make acquaintance with the ferns you must forget your botany” (cited in Bickman, 1999, p. 2).

Thoreau is not suggesting giving up the study of botany but advocating the use of mindfulness or presence when we observe an object. The famous Harvard biologist, Louis Agassiz, developed this approach in his teaching. He would give the students a natural object such as a fish to study and ask them to look at it closely and then produce an accurate description of the object before they could proceed with further investigation. This sometimes required hours, or even weeks, of looking at the fish (Menand, p. 100).

**Compassion, caring and lovingkindness.** Timeless learning can also be cultivated through compassion and caring. Compassion means suffering with or being with others. In this process, we can forget ourselves and again enter into a form of participatory learning. Nel Noddings (1992) has written extensively on caring and has suggested a number of activities that can be carried out in schools such as taking care of plants and animals. Csikszentmihalyi has suggested that gardening can often be a flow experience and other experiences suggested by Noddings can also be conducive to timeless learning.
Contemplation. Thomas Merton (1972) wrote, “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life” (p. 1). The contemplative act allows the person to become one with what he/she is observing. Whitman wrote how children become the objects that they see and thus learn about the world in the process. Much of learning in schools keeps the student separate from the subject, but timeless learning through activities such as drama, visualisation, and integrated studies facilitates contemplation.

Examples of Timeless Learning

Montessori education. This chapter began with a quotation from Maria Montessori who developed the concept of cosmic education. Cosmic education encourages students to see themselves in relation to the unfolding of the universe. Aline Wolf (2004) has recently written about Montessori’s vision of cosmic education. She argues that:

Essentially Montessori’s cosmic education gives the child first an all-encompassing sense of the universe with its billions of galaxies. Then it focuses on our galaxy, the Milky Way, our solar system, planet Earth and its geological history, the first specimens of life, all species of plants and animals and finally human beings. Inherent in the whole study is the interconnectedness of all creation, the oneness of things. (p. 6)

Wolf makes reference to the work of Brian Swimme and the Universe Story, which describes the unfolding of the universe. Cosmic education helps children place themselves within the total framework of the universe. The image of the universe presented by Montessori and Swimme is one of order and purpose. Since human beings are part of the universe, it gives students a common reference point beyond the boundaries created by nations and religions.

Wolf also points out how cosmic education can help children develop a sense of reverence for life and care for the earth. Seeing the miracle of life on earth within the vastness of the universe can help students appreciate more deeply life and the earth itself. Cosmic education can also give students a deep sense of gratitude as well. Wolf writes:

As examples, when we see a beautiful valley nestled in the mountains, we can reflect on the fact that it was formed by water that laboured thousands of years to wear down the mountainous terrain, when we enter a car or train, we can look back and feel grateful to the first human being who constructed a wheel. Awareness of the long-term cosmic pattern, of which we are only an infinitesimal part, calls us to a deep humility and reverence for all the labours of nature and the work of human beings that preceded us. (p. 16)

Wolf suggests that cosmic education can give children a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Connecting with the mystery of the cosmos was identified earlier as one of the main characteristics of timeless learning.
Waldorf education. Time is viewed rhythmically in Waldorf. The flow of the seasons and the flow of the breath provide touch points, or metaphors, for the Waldorf teacher. Harwood (1958) comments:

All rhythm—not only that of the heart and lungs—is intimately involved with a process of breathing in and out. Every day is a time of the inbreathing of new experiences: every night a time of surrendering in sleep what has been won for good or ill during the day. Every year brings the contracting process of winter, when life sinks into the depths of the earth; and the expansiveness of the summer, when it soars with pollen into the far spaces of the atmosphere. Human life itself swings from the inbreathing of childhood and youth to the outbreathing of old age; it is bounded by the inbreath at birth, which brings the first experience of the earth and the outbreath at death, which carries the departing spirit into other worlds. (p. 73)

This rhythmic view of life and learning has a timeless quality as it is removed from chronological time. Central to Waldorf education is eurythmy, Steiner’s approach to movement. Eurythmy is used at all levels of Waldorf education, although it is probably most important during the elementary years. Eurythmy is not dance movement or personal expression; instead, it is a physical form of speech. The physical gestures are taken from the movements of the larynx. The arms and hands are very important in eurythmy. Eurythmy can also be performed to music and this is called “tone eurythmy”. In eurythmy, the student brings the cosmos down into their being through movement. This movement then has an eternal, timeless quality.

Krishnamurti Education

Surely, a life that has significance, the riches of true happiness, is not of time. Like love, such a life is timeless; and to understand that which is timeless we must not approach it through time but to understand time. (Krishnamurti, 1996, p. 80)

Krishnamurti’s ideas about education are presented in several books (1953, 1974, 1978). For Krishnamurti (1953) the aim of education is to “bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole” (p. 24). This ability to see life as whole involves what Krishnamurti calls intelligence. In his words, “Intelligence is the capacity to perceive the essential, the what is; and to awaken this capacity, in oneself and in others, is education” (p. 14). Perceiving ‘what is’ means not being caught up in ideals or models that get in the way of being in the present moment. This idea of being present to what is relates to timeless learning. In a paper on “Time and Transformation” Krishnamurti (1996) writes:

When you no longer depend on time as a means of transforming what is because you see the falseness of that process, then you are confronted with what is, and you are interested to understand what is, naturally you have a quiet mind... Thus regeneration is only possible in the present, not in the future, not tomorrow. (pp. 82–3)
Education then for Krishnamurti should bring students and teachers into the present, or the timeless moment. Being present in the moment allows the person to be free; to be where the individual is no longer confined by cultural conditioning. The Krishnamurti schools, mostly found in India, have attempted to implement his vision. Being close to nature and following its rhythms is an important aspect of all these schools.

Conclusion

Many teachers within public systems also nurture timeless learning. They do this primarily through their presence. At the beginning of this chapter, I cited a teacher who was being more mindful in her teaching. By being mindful and present, teachers can connect more deeply with their students and learning processes. Over the past 18 years, I have introduced teachers to meditation and mindfulness practice that support their presence in the classroom and found that these practices can make a significant contribution to teaching (Miller & Nozawa, 2002). Timeless learning then is not limited to alternative education but can flow from the heart and being of teachers wherever they are.

REFERENCES


IAN MILLS

2. SOUL EDUCATION IS EDUCATION FOR HAPPINESS—THROUGH THE CULTIVATION OF AN UNDERSTANDING NATURE

ABSTRACT

Since, as Aristotle says, the main goal of life is happiness, and happiness is an activity of the soul, it follows that the main aim of soul education should be education for happiness. And education for happiness is, as Spinoza says, the endeavour to preserve one’s own being. But, paradoxically, it is only in approaching the Other that I attend to myself. I learn to understand (know and support) my self only by first reaching out to understand (know and support) the Other. So soul education is education for happiness through the cultivation of an understanding nature.

I take as my basic premise that our ultimate desire is, as Aristotle says, happiness: “Now happiness above all else appears to be absolutely final in this sense, since we always choose it for its own sake and never as a means to something else” (1996, p. 11). Other things, for example, wealth, esteem, pleasure, are but means to the main goal, which is happiness. It would therefore seem logical that our primary aim as educators should be to educate to enhance happiness; then education to enable the acquisition of wealth, esteem, pleasure etc. becomes a secondary aim, insofar as those things assist in attaining happiness. Aristotle then adds that, “happiness is a certain activity of the soul” (1996, p. 22). So that education for happiness as the primary educative goal is actually an educating of the “activity of the soul”. Soul education is education for happiness. And that is education’s main goal. So I need to begin by asking: In what way is happiness a certain activity of the soul?

According to Spinoza, “Happiness consists in this, that a man [woman] is able to preserve his [her] own being” (1993, p. 152). Firstly, what is this “own being” that needs, for our happiness, to be preserved. “Being” I take to be living or “Life” itself. And what is implied by own being is that each one of us is a unique form or mode of Life. So I am talking about the need to preserve one’s own unique life or unique mode of being in the world. As Shakespeare said, through Polonius, “To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man” (1955, p. 875). In addition, in this regard, Spinoza adds, “The life with which each is content and rejoices in is the soul of that individual”
Which brings me back to Aristotle’s definition that “happiness is a certain activity of the soul”; it is that activity which involves pre-serving or being true to one’s soul as one’s unique mode of being (living) in the world, “to preserve his [her] own being”, “to experience your True Nature”, “to thine own self be true”. Therefore, soul education as education for happiness necessarily means learning how to pre-serve or be true to one’s own unique nature or one’s unique mode of Life-energy.

If, in fact, the activity of the soul which is happiness is that particular activity of life with which each is content and rejoices in, I think I need to ask, firstly, what the activity of Life is and, secondly, how one learns to make each one’s life contented and joyful in its own unique way, if I am to under-stand how soul education is education for happiness.

First, what is the activity of Life? I would suggest, as a starting point, that Life is relating. If the various parts of my body-mind cease to relate to each other or if I cease to relate to other beings, such as the air I need to breathe, the water I need to sustain me, then I am dead or dying. Therefore, if Life is the activity of relating, then, according to Spinoza, my soul is that kind of relating which makes me-specifically content and joyful and according to Aristotle, that kind which makes me happy. Therefore, my soul is my specific way of relating contentedly-joyfully-happily in the world. So to pre-serve my “own being” is to pre-serve my soul as a unique mode of contented-joyful-happy relating. So that is the appropriate goal of soul education: to fulfil, to the highest degree possible, the unique potential of each individual to relate beneficially in the world—where beneficial is seen as being, each in one’s own way, contented-joyful-happy.

But, as soon as I speak of relating, I am immediately conscious that more than one party is involved. Relating involves an accommodation of my own being with beings other than me. I immediately see that this activity of soul, Life, is a continuous adjustment of my internal relations with an infinity of external relations going on in the world outside me. My internal relations being contented-joyful-happy is the soul of me, but the state of those internal relations is always inter-related with, and more or less dependent on, how I am relating to my exteriority, to the Other. So the scope of soul education is instantly extended from an exclusive focus on one’s own being to an inclusion of one’s beneficial relating with, potentially, an infinity of other beings (all Being), each moment affecting my own well-being. And, paradoxically, it is the case that I, in fact, need to firstly care for the well-being of the Other if I am to ensure my own well-being. For example, unless I firstly take care that the air I breathe and the water I drink are pure, my own well-being will suffer. As Dogen says, “Foolish people think that if they give first, their own benefit will be lost. But this is not so. Beneficial action is an action of oneness, benefiting self and others together” (1985, p. 46). Thus, the goal of soul education as education for individual happiness immediately becomes mutually beneficial relating.

To that end, it would seem logical that, if I am to achieve beneficial relating both within myself and between myself and the Other, I would first need to under-stand both myself and the Other. Under-standing is the necessary foundation of
mutually beneficial relating. In fact, not only can there be no relating without under-standing, but the activity of Life as a process of inter-relating is already a process of under-standing. Life (soul activity) is that which stands under as the support of each individual being, while flowing through and between all beings—what we all are in common—being our oneness. So Spinoza can say, “there is only one Sub-stance, and it is infinite” (1993, p. 9). Our word sub-stance, in fact, means under-standing. To be true to who I am means to be under-standing; I am, essentially, a unique mode of relating-as-under-standing. Thus to pre-serve my own being, save my soul, as a way of being happy, inevitably involves being what I am, being under-standing. I am who I am, and thus happy, only insofar as I am being under-standing in a way only I can be. Therefore, to achieve its goal of mutually beneficial relating, soul education would need firstly, as a foundation for that process, to encourage, both within and between individuals, the cultivation of an under-standing nature. And the bonus is that such a “being under-standing” is a source of exquisite joy in itself—in its all-ways bringing me closer to sharing all things with all beings, which, as intense relating, is the soul of me.

If, then, I am to cultivate an under-standing nature with the aim of achieving mutually beneficial relating within and between the self and the Other, it might seem that, firstly, I would need to inculcate an understanding of the self—how the essential self (the soul) is an activity of beneficial relating—with the Other. Spinoza tells us that, “the essence of man [woman] is desire” (1993, p. 152). And although desire, properly understood, is that continuous longing within me for an infinity of relating with all beings, thus confirming that I am essentially the activity of relating, yet my daily experience and observation tells me that humans commonly mis-interpret and practise desire as desire to possess the Other (other beings, things) for the self, mostly in competition with the Other. Thus the desired object intervenes as an obstacle to beneficial relating; there is mostly a mis-understanding, causing a conflicting rather than a beneficial relating. But the first step towards under-standing the self as an activity desiring beneficial relating is learning that to understand the self is firstly to forget the self, for if I am firstly focused on the self as a possessing entity (to possess what other beings can give to me) I am already inhibiting the self as beneficial relating (with all beings). So, Dogen tells us: “To study the way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualised by all beings” (1985, p. 70).

Paradoxically, the reality is, that it is only by firstly reaching out to stand-under or support the Other, identify with the Other, that I get to under-stand (actualise) my self. As Levinas says, “It is only in approaching the Other that I attend to my self” (1969, p. 178). It is only by originally under-standing the Other that I can get to really under-stand my self. Therefore, the first step in the cultivation of an under-standing nature is understanding the necessity of firstly endeavouring to under-stand the Other—as the only way to under-stand both the Other and myself—as the basis for a mutually beneficial relating.

But I cannot stop at that first step, for it is insufficient, incomplete and even damaging unless followed up with the second step, a reflecting back with new under-standing towards myself. The recognition of and respect for the Other’s
difference is the basis for the recognition of and respect for my own difference. And it is that “difference” that is the “ownness” of my “own being”, that identifies how my soul is “my” soul. Not to take the second step is as disastrous as not to take the first, because we need both interacting together, the under-standing of the Other intertwined with the under-standing of the self, if we are to effect a mutually beneficial relating. If I stop after the first step, I am in danger of what Heidegger calls “falling into the everydayness” of the “they-self” of the dominant ideology or losing my self (my soul) in the will of the Other.

This balancing of an under-standing (recognition) of the Other as a path towards an under-standing (recognition) of my self is encompassed in the practice of what Spinoza calls fortitude. Fortitude is the virtue (Lat. virtus, strength), which combines generosity and courage as acting simultaneously in my relating with the Other. I reach out with generosity to under-stand (stand under) the Other, while at the same time enjoying the courage of affirming my own way of being in the world. It is balancing responsibility for the Other and myself with freedom for the Other and myself, a double, double joy-in-mutually-beneficial-relating.

But the process does not stop there. In addition, such reciprocal cultivation of an under-standing nature has its own wondrous flowering, containing within itself the seeds of a potentially continuous co-regeneration. I not only learn how I now am, as co-revealed in this inter-activity of mutual under-standing between myself and the Other, but perhaps the most delicious fruit of our mutually beneficial relating is that it also en-courages between us a reciprocal co-creativity, whereby I can extend my under-standing of how I now am into a realisation of my potential—how I can become even more fully who I am. The Other not only illuminates who I am, she/he/it also both reveals what I am not yet and offers me the possibility of our being co-creative together to continuously co-regenerate each our self into an even fuller flowering of who we each potentially are. So, after the first two steps, which taken together constitute a co-revelation of the Other and my self, the third step in the cultivation of an under-standing nature is the effecting of a reciprocal co-creation between the Other and myself, in a way that leads to a co-regeneration of the self—in all beings.

Most importantly, this third step is a focusing not on the Other nor on my self but on that third entity which is Our-Between. As Irigaray (1993) reminds us, “If the pair of lovers cannot safeguard the place for love as a third term between them, they can neither remain lovers nor give birth to lovers” (p. 57). So, eventually, I focus not on the Other (especially not lose my self in the Other), nor yet do I remain focused on my self (I let go my ego, “forget the self”), but I concentrate now on our-between, on endeavouring, co-creatively with the Other, to “safeguard the place for love as a third term between” us—as the only viable way to ensure our continuous co-regeneration. There are three elements in that process, each of which deserves some consideration: (1) Love as a third term between us, (2) The Place for Love, (3) The Safeguarding of that Place.

Firstly, “love as a third term between us” can be identified as the “mutually beneficial relating” already referred to. Life, which is what each individual of Nature essentially is, is a continuous adjustment of internal relations with external relations.
Therefore, what is most crucial for the continuous happiness of each and all is a focusing, not on the self nor the Other, but on the relating between us, which requires continuous adjustment, because all things are all-ways changing. As the Lover said to the Beloved, “Tonight ain’t the same as last night, sweetheart”. If, for example, the Israelis and Palestinians focus on either pole, each on what they see as the justice of their own position, they will never be reconciled; what is needed is a continuous working out of a way of mutually beneficial relating between them, outside a focusing on the self or the Other or on things (land, ideology, etc). Life is not just. Life (the soul of us) is relating.

The primary need is for soul education, which is education for beneficial relating between us, which, in turn, is dependant on the cultivation of an understanding nature. I can only be happy if, firstly, the between of the Other and me is harmonious. Secondly, our between, this third term, is intermediary not only between me and each other individual I encounter, but is cumulative, extending out from each of us to our community, our culture, our nation, our entire earth. There is an overall between, which reflects back each moment into each individual. The space-time curvature of universal inter-subjective relating is, perhaps, what some call God, others Mind itself, others the larger Self or Soul. But what I need to understand is that, the degree of our beneficial relating in the between of myself and each individual I encounter, is, as the proverbial butterfly’s wings, each moment progressively, however infinitesimally, affecting all beings eternally, as the in-between activity of all beings is reflecting back into me: “Know that you have innumerable beings in yourself… all beings are what they are because of your complete effort” (Dogen 1985, p. 80). My soul is interactively part of all Soul, our between.

What, then, is the nature of this Place, our between, which I need to safe-guard as a dwelling for the love which is our mutually beneficial relating? The chaos scientists say that the third colour always inserts itself. There is my colour (my soul as relating), your colour (soul as relating), and immediately in our being together the third colour (our between soul as our mutual relating) inserts itself. But into what does it insert itself? Ideally, paradoxically emptiness. As Lao Tzu says, “We turn clay to make a vessel, but it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends” (1987, p. 155).

If both or either of us, in our relating, has pre-dominantly in mind, the accommodation of things (wealth, power, ideology, our own ego), then, psychically, our between is rented out to those things, thus inhibiting the openness each changing moment demands if there is to be the mutuality of beneficial relating. So the ideal place for our mutually beneficial relating is a mutual psychic between space, of empty openness corresponding with what the physicists remind us is the actual physical reality in which we dwell together each moment, the emptiness of No-Place.

The scientists of General Relativity tell us that, “Space-time is the only thing that is really real” (Graves, 1971, p. 314), and since space-time is space mobile on itself, and each of us is a particle of space-time continuously mobile on itself, then we each/all always actually dwell in No-Place. For the Greeks this was U-Topos
(U = no, and Topos = place), the ideal place to be psychically, as how we naturally are in physical reality—the place Chuang Tzu so graciously also invites us to enter psychically:

Imagine that we were wandering in the palace of No-Place. Harmony and unity would be our themes, never ending, never failing. Join with me in actionless action! In simplicity and quietude! In disinterest and purity! In harmony and ease! My intentions are now aimless...The sage rests, truly rests and is at ease. In life he floats, at death he rests. He does not plot, nor design for the future. (1996, p. 193–194)

Finally, there remains the question of how we safeguard the openness-emptiness of this No-Place as a dwelling place most likely to encourage our mutually beneficial relating (our love). In fact, the qualities listed there by Chuang Tzu as being characteristic of our dwelling in No-Place are the very qualities we need to co-operatively practise—to safeguard our-between as a No-Place dwelling for our mutually beneficial relating. It is by practising those qualities that we firstly co-create such a psychic No-Place and, by continuing to practise them, we safeguard their presence there as a nurturing No-Place dwelling between us. Indeed, it is the cultivation of those qualities, individually and together, that can be seen as the final step in what I referred to above as “the cultivation of an under-standing nature”—a cultivation now focused on the continuous co-creative re-generation of our between.

There is not space here to discuss at length each of those qualities mentioned by Chuang Tzu, although there is a sense in which the practice of any one of them involves each of the others. The overall feel of this open emptiness which is the No-Place of our between is an ethos of both harmony and unity; in other words, there is no inequitable dis-cordance or oppositional disagreement in our inter-relating here; and that is effected by the cultivation of the qualities mentioned. Harmony and unity are achieved firstly by “actionless action” (wu wei), which means, in effect, that there is an absence of purpose in one’s action, the absence of that purposeful consciousness, which, in humans can be so destructive. This notion is reiterated with the words, “my intentions are now aimless”, and again with the phrase, “he does not plot nor design for the future”. To cultivate an emptiness of any purpose is seen as essential for the preservation of the integrity of our No-Place betweenness, as a dwelling of harmonious inter-relating. This absence of purpose is the “disinterest” that achieves a “purity” of atmosphere, not clogged with interfering goals of the ego. It implies cultivating an emptiness of the self.

Although the presence of “simplicity and quietude” immediately also suggest the necessity of cultivating a meditative practice, the continual reiteration of the words “harmony and ease” reminds me of perhaps the principal obstacle to our beneficial relating which we need to be empty of to achieve that “harmony and ease”—the tendency for one party to be in a position of entrenched dominance—the discordance of inequity.

It is almost always the case when humans are relating that one party dominates by reason of having more power (wealth, prestige, righteousness etc.), the coloniser over the colonised, men over women, the “haves” over the “have-nots”, humans
over other species. But as long as that situation is present there cannot be an equitable, and therefore beneficial, relating. Yet the soul is precisely beneficial relating. Therefore, soul education cannot shy away from the reality that, in most instances of relating, one party needs to give first and to give more. There has to be a certain degree of equity, if there is to be the “harmony and ease”, which is a necessary characteristic of the between place we need to safeguard for the beneficial relating that is the soul of us.

The surrender of dominance is one (if not the principal) effort needed to safeguard the “harmony and ease” of No-Place as our between dwelling. Being in No-Place means, above all, being empty of ego, endeavouring to dwell all-ways in no-man’s-land. So the third step, to “safeguard the place for love as a third term (No-Place) between” us, is, in a way, a return to the first step, “to forget the self”, in the process of our cultivation of an understanding nature—in the education of the soul as beneficial relating. To study the way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualised by all beings. When actualised by all beings, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realisation remains and this no trace [No-Place] continues endlessly (Dogen, 1985, p. 70).

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