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Editorial: Meaning and Purpose in All Our Endeavours

Jean Gordon, Co-editor, and Shanti George, Associate Editor

Introducing the theme

'Potential' is a rather over-used and under-defined term, particularly in educational systems where national and supra-national policies commonly talk about enabling children to 'reach their potential' or their 'full potential,' with the meaning often left hanging. In many cases, the implementation of the policies anyway goes against the expressed intentions or may even be an indirect way of justifying streaming or other mechanisms for 'sorting' children. The collection of articles that we have brought together in Issue 4 of this magazine illustrate, individually and collectively, the links between the notion of 'potential' and the vibrant energy and motivation that comes from the feeling that one has a sense of direction and purpose.

Mamphela Ramphele — South African political activist, academic and doctor — considers the unique assets of each child as essential to learning, to the process of finding meaning and purpose in one's life and environment, and to understanding how best we 'learn how to be human in a world that's changing' (Ramphele 2015). Learning for Well-being (L4WB) describes 'unique potential' as the vital energy and qualities that provide meaning, purpose and direction to an individual's life. We explore this in Issue 4 along with authors living and working in very different situations and settings whom we have invited to contribute. Their articles together illustrate some different ways in which the unfolding of each person's unique potential encourages self-discovery towards the expression of particular gifts and contributions, what L4WB and Scherto Gill in her article here call 'flourishing.'

By highlighting the importance of going through life with meaning and purpose, we give priority to processes that contribute to the well-being of individuals as well as whole communities and societies. In one of the two Viewpoints that opens this collection of articles, Linda O'Toole argues persuasively that a strong sense of self can enhance rather

than undermine a strong sense of connectedness to others. Scherto Gill suggests that authentic energy comes from the intersection of individual and collective potential, referring to the pulsing energy and qualities that provide meaning and direction to individual and collective life. Aviva Gold's article in this Issue draws resonantly on Ubuntu philosophy from South Africa to emphasize that it is only through our engagement with other persons that each of us becomes a full person.

Key to nurturing young people's unique potential is the development of holistic processes that take account of all aspects of children's lives - what the Italian educator Loris Malaguzzi called the 'hundred languages' of childhood, framing an image of the child as 'rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and connected to adults' (Moss in Cameron & Moss 2011). Agnetha Birgersson's contribution to this Issue provides a beguiling account of how parents can support children on the basis of such an image.

We now live in societies whose underpinning philosophies and history have created governance and institutions that often produce and reproduce fragmentation at multiple levels. This concern provides the background to the collection of essays titled *The Connected School; a design for Well-being*, edited by Colleen McLaughlin (McLaughlin 2015). In one essay, Colleen McLaughlin and John Gray report that school connectedness has emerged as a positive influence on young people's well-being where it describes a 'linked group of activities and experiences, including relationships between peers and with teachers, levels of pupil satisfaction with school experience and feelings of membership and belonging to the learning community of the school and the classroom. It is about making a valued contribution, which, in turn, can develop a sense of agency. Pupils who feel valued, connected to school and cared for by people at school have a higher degree of well-being' (McLaughlin & Gray 2015).

That schools can aspire to such connectedness is well illustrated by the short films of inspiring teachers and school leaders that bring to life the piece by Hartger Wassink and Shanti George in this issue, with a counterpoint provided in the article by Alberto Paganini and Els Laenens on the lack of connection that children can experience in current educational systems. Maaïke Nap's contribution reflects – from a teacher educator's viewpoint – on how connections are established when a teacher is wholly present in the classroom, relating to each pupil as a whole person. Meg Freeling's article describes how in her writing classes she encourages her students to think about what it means to be a human being, beyond the specific activities.

How do we ensure that the spark of unique potential burns bright, unextinguished, through the long adult years that follow formal education? Aviva Gold presents art, in her contribution to this Issue, as profoundly revelatory and potentially transformative; a deep and joyful experience that allows us to seek out what truly motivates and moves us in our lives. Szymon Brzoska's piece eloquently evokes his personal experience of music as life spark. In a striking contrast, Yakarah Attias-Rosen recounts compellingly how the sense of discovery is rekindled through shared expeditions by groups of women – who are relative strangers – to participate in extreme sport in unknown terrain.

The common thread linking the articles in this issue can also be found in some contributions to Issue 3 around the theme of 'Engaged participation', as when Carolyn Conway and her colleagues wrote about providing highly disengaged young people with opportunities to be active citizens that then stimulated them with the energy to reach out to others in more difficult circumstances than their own. This common thread concerns the engagement of individuals that strikes deep inner chords and that mobilizes their energies towards those activities and ways of being that give them profound pleasure and satisfaction — and above all, feelings of mutual worth and mutual esteem, of being connected to the world around and of contributing something worthwhile.

The articles

Two 'Viewpoints' open this Issue, beginning with an overture by Polish composer Szymon Brzóska that is entitled 'Meaning and Purpose of Music Throughout my Life.' From his childhood onwards, he writes: 'There is no other world that I'd rather be in than the world of sounds.' The meaning he draws as a listener ranges across the emotional, aesthetic, philosophical and transcendental registers, with a shift when his professional purpose is to perform and compose. Readers are privileged to share in one of his early experiences of transforming the emotions of the moment into a short piece of music and in this way to share also the 'epiphany and bliss' when Szymon realizes his unique potential for transmuting life into creative sound.

After this overture, in her Viewpoint entitled 'An Insufficiency of "I",' Linda O'Toole addresses an aspect of learning that she thinks is too often ignored: cultivating an individual sense of self. She considers that discovering and expressing one's unique potential is a critical factor in how we learn, relate and work together. Though frequently the concepts of individualism and interdependency are experienced in opposition to one another, her view is that there is not a simple choice between valuing the group vs. emphasizing individual consciousness. Instead, our individual and collective well-being requires a balance of the needs of both individuals and the group – not privileging or giving undue weight to one or the other. In fact, an insufficient awareness of each individual's distinctive meaning and purpose in life significantly reduces the effective contributions to the group.

Philosophical perspectives on individual and human potential are taken further in the first article by Scherto Gill, 'Cultivating Human Potential – Towards Flourishing of All'. Individual and collective human potentials depend upon and enrich each other, she argues, with each person's unique potential best achieved by engaging in joint endeavours. All attempts that support our personal growth will therefore equally enhance our human system, together facilitating and expanding social transformation. In the example provided of the work of the Spirit of Humanity (SoH) Forum, it is posited that where individual and collective potential intersect, authentic energy will be generated and a space created that engenders peace, justice and flourishing as the basis of wholeness, values and relationships. This spiritual nature of our life can be shared in safe spaces of dialogue and contemplation in order to further inspire individuals to pursue lives of integrity that are based on the right relationships with oneself and with the greater unity to which we all belong.

The following four articles avail of different entry points that illuminate the quest for meaning and purpose in education, given that schools are where individuals meet within a collective setting from early on in life.

How high school students in an English class in a US college explored their own sense of purpose – through a sequence of experiential writing exercises that ended with each student starting a small business – is the fascinating subject of Meg Freeling’s article ‘Doing Your “Bit” - Because You Can; English Composition Meets Accounting.’ Activities were organized as springboards to address such questions as ‘What does it mean to be a human being?’ and ‘How do I find my “bit” to do in life?’ Practical experience with accounting enriched the learning process when English composition was expanded to include a self-created business enterprise that responded to a wider need, and in this way moved the students from abstractions to action. Their writing became grounded in new meanings through processes of creating a business, exchange and book keeping, that in turn generated fresh responses and new lines of thought.

The next two articles are rooted in the Unfolding symposium organized in the Netherlands by NIVOZ and the Learning for Well-being Foundation in February 2017. Hartger Wassink and Shanti George, who were centrally involved in the design and organization of the conference, take a step back to reflect on the deep purpose of this symposium and its messages for educational systems. In their article ‘Enabling Human Potential to Unfold Within School Environments: Education as Dialogue and Narrative at Multiple Levels,’ they describe how the symposium approached sensitive subjects innovatively, through dialogue rather than debate and they highlight the strengths of dialogue. The valuable narratives that can emerge from dialogue are illustrated by the short films of inspiring everyday practice within schools that led each session of the symposium and that demonstrate how a nurturing school can enable every child to seek her or his life purpose and meaning within clusters of mutually supportive relationships. We highly recommend that readers watch these short films that are rich in reflection and that exemplify what can be done.

A second article has grown out of one of the films from the Unfolding symposium: it is by Maaïke Nap who is an experienced teacher educator from the Netherlands and her article is titled ‘What Lies at the Heart of Teacher Education? Boxes Within Boxes, Worlds Within Worlds, Seeing and Being Seen.’ How can trainee teachers find such rich meaning and purpose in their experience of teacher education that they are moved and enabled to support their pupils through similar processes of inner development? The author’s reflections on this question are illustrated by exercises that she uses to increase trainee teachers’ sensitivity to pupils. Her own story is one of unfolding purpose from childhood onwards to be a teacher (undeterred by the arid pedagogy of her own years as a schoolchild), a purpose that was rewardingly achieved and taken further in her current position as teacher educator.

What if certain children find that school undermines their learning instead of nurturing it? Among the articles in this Issue that focus on education, the final one – ‘Learning for Freedom and Well-being; Reflections About Unfolding our Unique Potential’ by Alberto Paganini and Els Laenens – answers this difficult question by advocating the steps taken by

their two children when they found the school curriculum at odds with their own learning trajectories. The authors/ parents describe their own personal educational journeys from a generation earlier as background and context for the personal educational journeys undertaken by their children. Self-schooling, projects that motivated the children, sufficiently challenging learning environments at home – these were some of the creative responses whereby the parents supported their children in their choices to find meaning and purpose related to their personal learning paths, outside conventional schooling.

Following on from the article just described where home became school, the article by Agnetha Stagling Birgersson – ‘Giving a Space for Me to be Me – Parenting with Intention’ – focuses on the invaluable space that the home provides for powerful and fundamental learning about the inner self within the intimate relationship of parent and child. The emphasis is on mutual learning and especially on the opportunities for personal development among parents through connection with oneself as well as with one’s child. ‘Intentional parenting’ denotes meaning and purpose for both child and parent, as they develop in synergy. Using as an example a situation that would constitute a nightmare for parents with mischievous children (i.e. most parents), the article offers steps to respond to such a situation in ways that combine practical use with reflective depth.

This Issue is rounded off with two articles that go beyond school and home to illuminate continuing meaning and purpose in adult lives, by turning the spotlight onto adventure travel and transformational art.

‘Queen of the Desert – a Journey’ by Yakarah Attias-Rosen describes — in an appropriately lively and energetic tone — her first-hand experience of the ‘women empowerment trips’ organized by the Queen of the Desert organisation. These are challenging journeys that often stimulate the women who undertake them to explore their inner selves as well as the new landscape around and to search for the special qualities that each one can contribute to the group. Participants embark on a difficult journey that calls for much energy and commitment, yet with very little prior information. The excitement and pleasure of building trust within the group and of challenging oneself through encounters with the other relatively unknown members of the group as well as with local women in the country visited, amidst the demanding physical activities of extreme sport, together engender a parallel internal adventure of self-discovery.

The final article ‘Answering the Call: The Role of Transformational Art Processes’ by Aviva Gold presents art in all its manifestations as potent magic available to humankind for spiritual revelation and healing, as well as a universal language to open the heart. Aviva’s life-long creative work ‘Painting From The Source®’ involves spontaneous and intuitive expression through painting enhanced by the additional dimensions of sound, movement and poetry, drawing widely on ancient tribal traditions as well as on theories such as Jung’s Individuation. Readers can glimpse an experience that has enlivened and transformed many lives and are invited to paint – either alone or with others, whether with earlier experience or not – in the knowledge that engaging in transformational art can render us aware of what excites us and what makes us feel more fully alive.

Enjoy reading this collection of articles illustrated by photos, paintings, a piece of music and several short films!

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Viewpoint 1: Meaning and Purpose of Music Throughout my Life

By Szymon Brzóska

Music and meaning

Since I was a child, music has always surrounded me and had an extremely important meaning in my life. I started my musical education when I was seven years old, first learning piano in primary and secondary school and continuing to study composition and music theory in the conservatorium. Nineteen years of studying music helped me grow as an artist and led me to start a professional life as a composer; a life where my love for music can be fulfilled.

Apart from the professional aspect, where composing and performing music give an ultimate purpose to my life, there is another important meaning: enhancing and supporting my well-being.

There is no other world I would rather be in than in the world of sounds; I chose to be a listener in every possible moment, diving into an aesthetical and emotional space, sometimes even philosophical and transcendental. Music has a unique power to move me between those worlds.

As a composer I draw inspiration mostly from emotions, as this is how I perceive music – also as a listener – through the fascinating world of many different, contrasting feelings, powerful and unique, often very personal and quite overwhelming. And as much as this perception can be subjective, it often leads to a pure metaphysical experience. I have to say I am extremely attracted and moreover, I am addicted to that specific feeling; the very moment when while listening to music, one creates this special, unreal world, which

separates us from everything else. A world where you just want to stop for a longer while, to absorb and enjoy.

This is also how I see the creative process. I experience an emotion, a feeling, a certain specific condition of mind, and I try to translate it into music. Sometimes it is an epiphany and bliss, but often a challenge. The process is never effortless really, but always, what is very important to me, the writing comes from an honest and pure place. And finally, sharing my work with an audience is perhaps the most important and rewarding experience. I would like to share with you a short piece I have composed that has a special meaning to me and expresses the quality and essence of my music.

Ultima Forsan (perhaps the last) evokes a feeling of loss or inevitable end. It is melancholic, yet it tries to express an emotion that goes beyond sadness; there's a certain light to this music, an *under-the-skin* feeling of hope that eventually shines over the bourdon bass note in the very last chord of the piece.

I composed *Ultima Forsan* when I was about 22 years old, a time when I questioned many things and often remained uncertain about the answers. Yet this small piece became a constant reminder of the unique and important meaning of music in my life: giving me strength and purpose by continuing doing what I love and at the same developing my unique potential, as an artist and as a human being.

<https://soundcloud.com/szymonbrzoska/08-ultima-forsan>

Author

Polish composer Szymon Brzóška (born 1981) graduated from the Music Academy in Poznań, as well as the Royal Flemish Conservatory in Antwerp. Szymon's particular interest in the synergy between music, contemporary dance, theatre and cinema has led him to participate in numerous collaborative projects across various art forms.

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Viewpoint 2: An Insufficiency of "I"

By Linda O'Toole

Introduction

An aspect of learning, relationships and group interactions that seems too often downplayed or even ignored is cultivating an individual sense of self. Taking account of this implies being aware of myself as an individual, and recognizing my own unique qualities and purposes. This is to be understood in the context of Mamphele Ramphela's description of learning as "a quest to identify and define one's mission in life" ... (which) ... "becomes a way of learning how to be human in a world that is changing whilst discovering one's own role as a unique agent in shaping one's environment for the better." [Ramphela, 2015]

For me, discovering, cultivating, and expressing one's unique potential is an extremely critical factor in how we learn, relate and work together. I refer to the lack of knowing and expressing one's unique self as an insufficiency of "I." In this viewpoint I will explore what I mean by that phrase. First, I consider the concepts of individualism and interdependency, which are often experienced in opposition to one another; then, I discuss the importance of acknowledging an insufficiency of "I," followed by what is required to cultivate a *sufficiency* of "I," and the benefits of that stance, as I see it.

Individualism

As an American working in a northern European context, I am keenly aware of the concern among educators and others about what can be termed "rampant individualism." This trend is particularly associated with, but not exclusive to, government policies, economic trends, media and popular culture in the United States. As someone with a deep interest and background in individual differences in how we learn and interact, I am often confronted about the term "individual." On one occasion when I used a phrase describing a facet of self-agency as "learning to be and become me ... in order to contribute to the community and society in a way that truly nurtures the uniqueness of me," a colleague

expressed passionate alarm at the misguided emphasis of “me” being used within the context of well-being and learning.

Individualism is defined as the belief that the needs of each person are more important than the needs of the society or group. It is characterized as encouraging individual freedom and initiative, placing “all values, rights and duties of the individual as ethically paramount to those of an abstract identify such as society.” In this sense, individualism in western societies can be considered as a significant factor in the breakdown of social norms, the fracturing of traditional family and community networks, and the fragmenting of group cohesion and shared values.

But taking account of individual perspectives – acknowledging the value of knowing oneself as an individual – is distinctly different than putting one’s needs or views above those of the group or others. Understanding and expressing one’s sense of self does not require isolation, self-centeredness, or ignoring the needs of others. In fact, I would argue that cultivating a sense of one’s unique self allows you to bring yourself more fully to all those with whom you engage, and contributes significantly to how you are able to participate in your community and social groups.

Interdependency

It has become almost a cliché to point to increasing interconnections among us, across the world – through media, economics, climate, travel, and so forth. Locally and internationally, environmental and social activists have urged a shift in mindset to adopt attitudes and behaviors that focus on the well-being of society as a whole, strengthening local communities, and the interdependency of all living systems. In recognizing our impact on one another, there is a growing demand for collective interventions and to feel more strongly united around “we-consciousness.” For example: “We are all in this together!” is an expression that takes on particular meaning in relation to climate change. If there is ever a time that as humans we need to act interdependently, with an awareness of our relationships and our impact on others, it is now.

Individual and group interdependency

This moment requires more than adopting an either/or stance – it is not a simple choice between valuing the group vs. emphasizing individual consciousness. My view is that our individual and collective well-being requires a balance of the needs of both individuals and the group – not privileging or giving undue weight to one or the other.

As we struggle to find the balance between the individual and the group, what I find most common is an insufficiency of “I” – a lack of paying attention to who I am as an individual human being ... in relation to others and to the environment, but also to exploring, discovering and nurturing my own individual self.

An insufficiency of “I” does not imply that the individual is the primary focus or the only focus of all activity, nor does it imply self-centeredness or a lack of recognizing the ways in which our lives are deeply connected to and interwoven with others and the environment.

Rather, it projects the notion that within the specific context of a particular circumstance there is an insufficiency of self for full development and the unfolding of one's unique potential (or soul's purpose).

The lack of a sufficient awareness of "I" often leads to a situation in which there is too much focus on external points of validation where the needs of each person are no longer taken into account – one is following group norms that are not sufficiently internalized so the individual becomes distant or alienated from the group.

Organizational consultant Roger Schwarz developed a rebuttal to "There's no I in team" which is a common sports slogan adopted by the business world. The idea behind the slogan is that sports and business teams must focus on what's best for the team. If team members do that, then the team will be successful; if team members focus on what's best for them individually, the team will suffer. As Roger points out, and I would second, there needs to be an "I" in team; without each of us bringing our "I" to our teams, individual well-being suffers. For me, the even more critical point is that when I turn myself over exclusively to the goals and ways of working of the team or group, I am compromising the best of what I can offer to the group. When I bring myself fully, with my life-purpose present in my heart and mind, and with the diversity of my own needs and ways of processing, I enrich the groups in which I participate and generate more creativity.

Sufficiency of self/bringing the "I"

There are many ways to describe the core self (the "I"). One phrase that resonates for me is the soul in evolution – the unique and dynamic organizing principles of a particular individual. In my view, every person is born with innate and endless potential to be fully her/himself. In the simplest expression, this is our unique self. A sufficiency of self requires you to be present to the full circumstances of your life; or, to paraphrase Albert Schweitzer: to engage in the process of becoming more finely and deeply human.

I think of the unique potential (core self) as represented through the vital energy and qualities that provide meaning, purpose and direction to an individual's life. Living this definition requires us to encourage self-awareness and the expression of specific talents, gifts and contributions. Instead of defining humankind as "tool makers", Robert Kegan (and others) speak of the most fundamental characteristic of humans as being *meaning makers* – it's how we make sense of our environments and learn about ourselves: "It is not that a person makes meaning, as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making," Kegan clarifies. (Kegan, 1982)

For me this view suggests that our reason for being is to become aware of our reason for being – discovering the particular, specific reason for being which is unique to each one of us. No other human being can substitute for our individual life force and purpose; no one else can take on our specific purpose in the way that we can.

By nurturing the flourishing of the undivided and evolving self within each of us, we are emphasizing the meaning and purpose in every life, and the precious quality of each

individual. When there is an insufficiency of “I,” we fall prey to the two-dimensional material world in which life can be too easily reduced to a series of transactions and a set of standardized responses to our own actions and those of others.

Francisco Varela, a Chilean biologist who focused on studying living systems and applying ecological principles to human cognition and consciousness, asserts that if a living system is out of balance, the remedy is to connect it to more of itself. In a literal sense, his words are easiest to comprehend in looking at systems such as streams or forests which need to function as organic wholes for health (and which falter when parts of the system are separated from other parts, such as by removing a natural predator or building a barrier). But they are equally applicable to humans, individually and collectively: when we find ourselves in unhealthy or unbalanced circumstances, we need to become more essentially who we are – connecting to and expressing our deepest selves – allowing ourselves to experience a sufficiency of “I”.

So many of the attributes that we consider necessary for the next generations are those that require a sufficiency of the self, an individual perspective: critical thinking, the ability to discern reliable and accurate information from that which is worthless, making decisions and choices that are right for me as an individual, being able to stand against peer or group pressure, knowing one’s strengths and talents, being able to use my capacities for development and growth; refining my sensibilities as an instrument of awareness and creativity, and so forth. As environmental activist Joanna Macy wrote: “The future is not out there in front of us, but inside us.” Without the willingness to turn our focus inward, to consciously employ ourselves as an instrument for sensing the emerging whole, and to understand our relationship to each situation as subject – this is who I am in relation to this situation rather than “things didn’t work out” – we are caught in an insufficiency of “I.”

My view is that living in an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, we must acknowledge ourselves as individuals while maintaining our connections with those around us. Our balance will never be perfect – because balance is ever changing according to the dynamics of our context – but we can aim for “sufficiency” – enough so that we can know ourselves and connect to that which has meaning and purpose for each of us.

Author

Linda O’Toole is co-editor of the Learning for Well-being Magazine and a senior fellow at the Learning for Well-being Foundation. She survived living in San Francisco in the 1960s, grows roses, and loves being alive.

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Cultivating Human Potential – Towards Flourishing of All

By Scherto Gill

Introduction

Individual unique potential and collective/communal human potential are interdependent and mutually enriching – each person's unique potential is best achieved by participating and engaging in common endeavours and shared ventures with others; and our collective human potential is best attained through fostering and nurturing the individual's specific qualities and capacities. Such mutuality also suggests that any attempt to support our personal growth will equally enhance our human system, all effecting greater social change.

In this article, human potential refers to the vital energy and qualities that provide meaning, purpose and direction to individual and collective life.¹ To understand the interdependent nature of human being and becoming and how we might support the unfolding of an individual's unique potential and our collective human potential towards flourishing of all, I will first explore three interrelated aspects fundamental to our conception of human potential, and then take the Spirit of Humanity Forum as a case-in-point to illustrate the importance of nurturing such interdependence. In particular, I would show that key relational processes, such as, safe and open space, practising silence, sharing narrative, engaging in dialogue/encounter and listening, can help cultivate and inspire each leader's unique personal and professional qualities and spirituality which are essential to supporting the flourishing of human potential as a whole, and the thriving of our societies and communities.

¹ In this article, the term 'human potential' refers our collective experience and 'unique potential' refers to that of the individual.

The interdependent nature of human being and becoming

Human life is simultaneously material, intellectual, social, moral and spiritual and comprises diverse experiences, activities and processes. As life itself has intrinsic value, so does the person who is living such a life. At the same time, being human is being aware that we are finite, and our personal qualities, habits, worldviews are always situated in our histories, memories, collective wounds, religious teachings, cultural practices and socio-economic and political institutions. So it is imperative for us to engage with others (including the Divine Other) and to be in a relationship with others in order to overcome our limitedness, transcend human conditions and achieve our individual and collective potential. In this way, our being and becoming is not only enriched by those others we encounter, but is also co-dependent on the growth of others and humanity as a whole. This perspective on human life can offer insights to three interconnected aspects on the way we conceptualise human potential. Let's explore them in turn.

a. Human potential as our gift to each other

Many thinkers have long pointed out the irreducible importance of other people in one's own life and the intersubjective nature of transcendent human conditions. For instance, Scottish philosopher John Macmurray has proposed that the presence of others is essential in our own being as humans. He writes that there can be no person whatsoever, without two persons in relation.² He goes as far as claiming that 'we need one another to be ourselves,' highlighting the relational way of our being.³ This relationship characterises the natural way that we take delight in the each other's being for its own sake. Macmurray claims that it is the only way to be human. Likewise, French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, when discussing the nature of human relationship, stresses the notion of *with*, and its metaphysical value, as a genuine *coesse*, or *being-with*.⁴ Being human is thus being-with (other humans and the Divine Other), a participatory relationship which requires an openness towards others and an intimacy with others. In this way, Marcel argues, being is communing.

To be with someone, is to make oneself truly available to the other. Such availing is equivalent to giving (and on the other's part, receiving) and in the giving and receiving, we transcend the boundaries between people through love. To avail ourselves to others is to hope for the possibility of others to unfold their potential, especially when we actively create an environment in which others can so respond. In this way, being-with becomes our responsibility for each other and being-with or communing encourages us to become more ourselves, or to be more fully human.

Nurturing individual potential through communing is our shared aspiration for human transcendence. This aspiration in turn enables us to strive to become more complete, into the wholeness that we are, a kind of mutual-humanisation. As Gabriel Marcel proposes, being human is a *vocation* (not in a religious sense) and it is in responding to the call for

² John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, London: Faber, 1961.

³ Macmurray, 1961, p. 211.

⁴ Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, London: The Harvill Press, 1951.

presence and relationship with others that we become more fully human.⁵ Thus, any seeking for meaning and purpose involves the returning to and affirming of one's own humanity (and human qualities) and the humanity of other people. Mutual nurturing and mutual humanising is the greatest gift we can offer to each other.

b. The 'we-ness' at the core of human flourishing

When understanding human potential from such a relational perspective, we can see that each person is a *participating* subject whose unique potential is only achieved through relationships with others – a co-presence in the world. The notion of a participating subject implies that as a person, one finds friendship/fellowship with others in that: 'I am a being *among* beings.' This leads us to suggest a further point that each person is also a *contributing* subject, in that 'I am a being *for* other beings,' whose being is realised through a form of care, respect and deep concern for others in the world. We each participate and contribute through our being and availing ourselves to others, through our growth and development, our synergetic relationship with others and through our service to others and to the world at large. So unfolding human potential always takes place within the realm of the 'we.'

To be aware of this 'we-ness' can help reduce the risk of our unfolding becoming egoistic and individualistic. When one is too preoccupied with oneself, one cannot make room for the presence of others and/or be the presence to others and in the world. Self-absorption can also be a form of alienation, alienation from others and from the world, which is a direct consequence of alienation from oneself, a withdrawal, the closing oneself off from communing.⁶ Paulo Freire elucidates this point further and encourages us to reject any suggestion, implicit or explicit, that a human being is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; equally Freire objects to any proposition that the world exists as a reality apart from people.⁷ Instead, he evokes an interconnectedness between persons and the world. That is to say, we are not merely persons in the world, but rather we are persons *with* others and *with* the world.⁸ Unfolding human potential involves keeping alive our mutually constituted relationship with the world and our duty of care for the world by proactively transforming the world and human lives within it.

We-ness implies self-reflectiveness in that each can recognise oneself and each other as 'we' or 'us.' Accordingly, this self-reflective we-ness can transform the bonds between people from the interpersonal (as a relation among persons) to the collective intrapersonal (as a relation between members of a group). Such bonds can further enable our being and acting to become communal where personal aims are essentially collective, e.g. ours. Communal activities or doing things together as a collective endeavour towards something that is most desirable for all, such as peace, is not only possible but it is also in the human's fundamental interests and well-being to do so.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Continuum, 1970.

⁸ Ibid.

c. Human potential through right relationships

Well-being is a state of complete harmony of the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.⁹ From this, we can derive that human being and human life can only be holistically perceived, from the material to the spiritual, from the lived to the transcendent. This wholeness is also reflected in the harmonious nature of all relationships embedded in the unfolding of human potential – a common striving for forming a delightful, consistent and coherent whole. This harmony is articulated by Earth Charter as right relationships.

The right relationships suggest that humans must seek to live rightly and wisely and in accord with the harmony of the cosmos/universe. Martin Buber proposes that the right relationship can be captured in dialogue.¹⁰ The life of dialogue involves the turning towards the other, not by seeking but by grace, as if we are called to dialogue, and in dialogue we consolidate our relationship with others and the spirit.

Silence and listening are key to dialogue. Attentive silence is active, and is a welcoming acceptance of the other; and any word born out of silence is received in silence. In silence arises the stillness, which is located in an in-betweenness of oneself and the other, a generative space. Listening is a form of love and when the community is a safe space, people are able to venture beyond rhetorical harmony and listen in ways that not only accept but also seek tension in our perspectives, values and worldviews. Listening thus can build the impetus of dialogue and invite the urge towards resolution, reconciliation and understanding, consolidating our relationships. Listening in dialogue is deep and involves suspension, silence, inner dialogue, inhabiting within one's own horizon, and self-transcendence.

So far, I have taken a closer look at three interconnected aspects in our understanding of the interdependence between individual and collective human potential, all of which would have implications on how we might pursue the flourishing of all agendas. For instance, this understanding immediately points to the need for systemic shift where right relationships can be inspired and where there is a sense of we-ness among all that is. Also highlighted is the need for deep *inner-work* that will enable us to participate in the mystery of being. Turning inwardly towards human spirit in our personal and professional life could further transform our socio-political and economic structure and institutional culture, as well as in the way we educate, leading to systemic change. Equally urgent is the need for dialogue and listening within social organisations and political institutions, especially when values are found in multiple expressions and our purpose and meaning articulated in myriad voices. When we listen so deeply and from the place of love, we might hear each other into words, into relationship, into action.

⁹ This has been captured by an integrated framework developed by Learning for Well-being.

¹⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, New York: Scribner, 1958.

Cultivating human potential: the case of the Spirit of Humanity Forum

At the intersection of individual and collective human potential is an authentic energy – the human spirit. This is where peace, justice and flourishing spring from. To inspire political commitment towards creating optimal conditions and the right relationships for human spirit to blossom, it is necessary to support global leaders and change-makers who have the courage to actively live out an undivided life, integrating the wholeness of our being. In other words, to nurture human spirit in our global leaders and change-makers is the beginning of the process towards systemic change. This is precisely the focus of the Spirit of Humanity (SoH) Forum.

The SoH Forum is a partnership organisation.¹¹ It was founded at a time when our world is threatened by violence and aggressions, the vulnerable human psyche of fear and desperation, and the irreversible damage inflicted on the delicate balance in the eco-systems of our planet. This is compounded by the social gulfs, political segregations and religious divides, separating our communities into us and them. All these have given an impression that our world is broken, as if the heart that was once here has stopped beating. There is so little space for mystery, for recognising the richest and fullest beings that we are. Without mystery, our world seems to be riddled with problems, and the more we treat the world as a problem, the more problems seem to appear, and with them, the woundedness, self-absorption and alienation.

To be sure, as responses to this brokenness, there have been movements and initiatives centred on structural reform, social justice, human rights and equalities. Likewise, there are also processes focusing on inner tranquillity and contemplative life. What seems to be required is to integrate these two external/systematic and internal/spiritual processes to create a loving and peaceful world.

In this context, the SoH Forum has been created to promote the innermost reshaping in our global leaders and change-makers. This is seen as part of our 'duty of care' for our world, the planet and humanity as a whole. Underlying the notion of care is also a recognition of the sacredness in being human and in all things in nature, and of the interdependence of the individual and collective flourishing. So to this end, the SoH Forum offers a global platform for leaders and change-makers to gather together for encounter, dialogue and mutual learning. In particular, the Forum focuses on encouraging spirituality in leadership, and explores new forms of values-based governance underpinned by care, respect, trust and relationships.

Since 2011, the Forum has found a home in Reykjavik especially due to the City's commitments to peace and its achievement in aspiring to become a world Capital of Peace. Reykjavik places great emphasis on human values in its work and policy and Iceland has created an environment where humans and nature celebrate close ties. In caring for all the beings on this land/island, Iceland has become the greenest country in the world, demonstrating that true peacefulness and flourishing is rooted in the right relationships

¹¹ I am a board member of the SoH Forum, and a member of its Executive Circle.

among all that is. Thus Reykjavik serves as an excellent venue for leaders and change-makers to not only discuss and dialogue about these matters but also experience first-hand the wholeness of our being.

The main activities of the SoH Forum range from a bi-annual 3-day Global Forum, regional Forum events throughout the year, a community of practice, the regular newsletters, and an annual publication of selected articles and papers written by the participants of the Forums.

In the space below, I will discuss a few features of the SoH Forum events in order to illustrate how it sets out to nurture the leaders and change-makers' qualities, who in turn support the unfolding of human potential through their social and political endeavours.

Safe and open space



In each SoH Forum event, the partners strive to create a safe and open space within which the participants can encounter, explore and experience. It is a richly human space, arisen from the purest intention and collective will. It integrates a relational space between the participants and an innermost space within each person him/herself. Within such a safe and open space, people seem to discover their authentic qualities and voices. For example, a quiet, shy young woman, who attended the most recent Forum, was so encouraged and empowered by this unique space that she came forward and conducted a 'symphony,' spontaneous and improvised music-making performed by all the participants together. As such, a safe and open space invites an engagement in the Forum's activities from the depth of who we truly are rather than from fear, pride or ego, and is nourishing and affirming.

Silence



During Forum events, each day starts with a period of sustained silence. As already discussed, silence is an active and more developed form of availing, and it is a presence, or communing. In contrast to non-presence/passivity, which results in fear, hesitancy and powerlessness, our presence through silence can transform the life and experience of each other in a most constructive sense. In other words, by immersing oneself in the mysteries of each other and by availing oneself to others, we set out on a journey to become whole human beings.

Narrative sharing and co-authoring



The Forum encourages narrative sharing. From the heads of state, to grassroots activists, from religious leaders to young people, the participants narrate the richest personal life stories of change, healing and transformation. These stories then become the narrative of our community, further strengthening a we-ness, celebrating myriad traditions, and co-constructing meanings in our life. In one of the Forums, when five women from different continents performed their respective stories of applying feminine wisdom in seeking peace amidst chaos, violence and discrimination, they were co-authoring the shared narrative of human spirit – the true anchor of human potential.

Dialogue and listening



Each Forum event is a dialogue, in silence, in the interchange between the presenters, during experiential workshops, in small group conversation, and throughout the informal spaces such as breaks and mealtimes. Such dialogue is the meeting of souls, a participant once told us, because it can only take place between whole beings, and that always involves our spiritual or higher self. As already touched upon, deep listening is the key to such dialogue. In one of the workshops entitled 'What is my responsibility for peace,' the participants were invited to enter into a dialogue with one's ancestors, and in the power of listening, they each had a profound experience of the importance of compassion and forgiveness in peacebuilding.

Conclusion

In this article, I explored a conception of human potential which stresses the interdependent nature of individual and collective flourishing. In doing so, I highlighted an idea that imbedded in our well-being is our relationship with others, with other communities, and with our world, including our planet. Only in the right relationships can life become whole, and only by unfolding our human potential can we live in such right relationships. Both require an urgent inner-reshaping. By turning to human spirit, we can truly take responsibility to care – care for each other and care for the world.

As illustrated by the SoH Forum's intentions and processes, such inner-reshaping through safe space, silence, narrative sharing, dialogue and listening, can be world-making – in nurturing and affirming the energies and qualities of global leaders and change-makers, in the unfolding of our individual and collective human potential, we also create a world in which all can flourish.

Author

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Doing your 'Bit' - Because You Can:¹ English Composition Meets Accounting

By Meg Freeling

Introduction

"To know one's place in history and find and do one's bit... To discuss the same issues that others discuss..., but to come from a different picture of the human being in the world." – Christopher Houghton Budd

"In my composition class I learned... that finding your purpose in life takes a lot of soul searching. My biggest take-away from this class is that even though talking about what you want to do in life is simple, you must put in work to turn your goals into accomplishments.... I think that my 'true' self is now more confident, patient and happy: more confident because I'm not afraid to chase after my dreams no matter what the circumstances hold for me; more patient because I can take time to make my dreams come true and become accomplishments; and more happy because I was taught in this class to use critical thinking about my purpose in life, and even though it was hard, I did learn how to start my own destiny path toward my 'bit'."
– A student.

In the fall of 2016, I worked with twenty-three high school students who signed up for my College English Composition class not only to see what they could learn about writing, but also to explore what it is like to be in college. They were part of a dual credit arrangement between Columbus State Community College (Ohio) and area high schools to keep young people challenged and make college more accessible. Those who passed the class would earn both high school and college credits.

¹ The title phrase, "Doing your 'bit' – because you can," is taken from a lecture by economic historian Christopher Houghton Budd, author of *Finance at the Threshold: Rethinking the Real and Financial Economies* (2011), at a conference held in Folkestone, England in June, 2016.

As an employee of the college, I am asked to focus on certain course requirements, including four major essays that meet college standards for written communication. These became the framework from which the course content emerged. My hope was that, based on the quality of student engagement, a sequence of gradual awakenings could emerge that would give participants the confidence to take on a kind of coming-of-age challenge at the end.²

The four major essays grew out of each other. The vital thread that tied them together was the question, “What does it mean to be a human being?”. And more pertinent to this group, the focus became, “What does it mean to be a human being when one is an adolescent?”

We started the course with an image and a verse. The image was a sketch of the human being in three parts: at the bottom was a concave, upward-directed “mirror” that represented the physical body as a reflector of what was going on above it in the higher parts of the self; next, a middle part represented the soul where thinking, feeling and willing connect the person to the world and to what one calls oneself, i.e. to one’s name; and at the top, a star represented one’s spirit, purpose and reason for being here, i.e. one’s “bit” to do in life. The verse was offered to help us remember what being human actually entails.

*To wonder at beauty
Stand guard over truth
Look up to the noble
Decide for the good
Leads us on our journey
To goals for our lives
To right in our doing
To peace in our feeling
To light in our thought
It teaches us trust in the guidance of God
In all that there is in the world-wide all
In the soul’s deep soil*

Rudolf Steiner³

These two pieces served as reminders for what could live behind our work together to strengthen our sense of purpose as to *why* we would want to learn to write and communicate with others, *what* was living in each of us that was striving to come out, and *how* this might be recognized and received so we could do our ‘bit’ in the world.

² The CSCC English Department requires a total of 5,000 words of student writing that meets the standards of academic English in order to earn credit for this Composition I semester course.

³ Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), author, lecturer, spiritual scientist, economist, educator, and founder of the Waldorf Schools Movement in Stuttgart, Germany in 1919, gave this verse to teachers in the school as a morning recitation for upper (high) school students.

The key themes we took up began as specific individual experiences, and then became the core content for the four major essays required for this English course.

Four essays in a nutshell

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| I. Observation Paper | Make an intentional, direct contact with the natural world. Put it into words. |
| II. Descriptive Language | Discover and use the 12 senses to explore and describe the world -- and the ways an author observes and experiences it. ⁴ |
| III. Three Interviews | Talk to three adults about their purpose in life and how they awoke to it. Write up the interviews plus a self-portrait of what you learned about yourself and your search for your own "bit" in life. |
| IV. Walk Your Talk | Create a business that serves others by doing something you love and are good at. Charge money. Track the accounting. Write it up. Integrate this learning with highlights from the rest of the course. |

In brief, Phase I (Observation) was designed to give students confidence in their own ability to perceive the natural world instead of taking it for granted through secondhand images created by someone else. Phase II (Descriptive Language) was designed to help them experience the twelve human senses and translate their expanded sensory experiences into consciously crafted words and phrases, using the descriptions of respected, published authors as models. Phase III (Three Interviews) was designed to give them an opportunity for focused conversations with adults about how the adults pursued their purpose in life and found their special "bit" to do in the world. Phase IV (Walk Your Talk) was designed to give students a direct experience of starting their own business as a way to try out something that relates to their current sense of purpose and how they could serve others through something they themselves already knew how to do – a step toward their "bit" to do in the world.

By being asked to have five to seven monetary transactions and track the finances of their projects, they became responsible for their own accounts. Through this project, they were able to move from "thinking about" something "out there" to actually doing a task that they determined was meaningful enough to follow through on here and now. This exercise put teeth into the question, "What does it mean to be a human being?", because it brought the thought from the realm of idea, through the realm of feelings and relationships,

⁴ The familiar five senses are sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The additional seven senses are balance, sense of life/health, self-movement (proprioception), warmth (temperature), word sense (speech/language), concept sense (thought) and ego sense (sense for the 'I' of the other). John Davy, "On Coming to Our Senses" (1983).

and into the realm of – using Aristotle’s term – “fine deeds.”⁵ After accomplishing this “fine deed,” students could walk away with a much more specific first-hand experience and confidence-building understanding of what it means to be a human being.

Learning from the Observation Essay

Given the wide array of current educational and developmental theories and practices, students come to each new educational opportunity with various assumptions based on the expectations of the adults they have been exposed to, the media that reinforces certain values and desires, and their own experiences over the course of their young lives. To create a class into a cohesive and vibrant learning community, students need a memorable beginning experience that grounds them in reality. Whether they engaged with a squirrel, a maple tree, a blue jay or a wasp, through the Observation Exercise students reported feeling more connected and engaged with life. They described what they observed with attentive awareness, interest, accuracy and a deepening sense of wonder. When some of their stories were shared, there was a sense of awe in the room, both for the experience of the connection being described and for the ability of the writer to describe it so engagingly. Students were learning from each other while being reinforced in their own efforts in the process.

Learning from the Descriptive Language Essay

Because the implications of having twelve senses was quite new to most of the students, we approached it slowly. We read articles rich in sensory descriptions and probed them to identify which senses the author was using to describe specific situations and events in the article. Students could recognize that it was not just the sense of hearing at work when one author described five different Spanish “languages” that she spoke, but it was actually a sense for the word, for speech itself that she had developed. And it was through his sense of balance that another author was able to climb the tallest fir tree and “ride it out” through a windstorm. The sense of touch gave another author the important research information about the bear cub he was holding, and it was a sense for the other person’s “I,” their genuine self, that allowed a grandmother to respond in just the right way to the troubled child. In this way, the senses and descriptive language came to life.

What I learned from doing the Three Interviews project

Building on the first two components of the course, students had some awakenings during their interviews with adults about how the adults discovered their purpose and their “bit” to do in life. Once their initial trepidation was overcome, the interviews were an opportunity

⁵ Aristotle is recognized as the “father of economics” in the stream of thinking called associative economics and is mentioned as such in a number of publications offered for study. Associative economics starts from the premise that, because humanity is now part of a one-world economy, the challenge is to reach an understanding of economics that all can own. It is based on the idea that economic life is the shared responsibility of all human beings and it strives to work in a non-partisan way to achieve this great task. Associative economics recognizes its debt to Rudolf Steiner, whose insights make a valuable contribution to the work of developing a modern humanity-wide economy.

for meaningful engagement with the world in a way that took the stories beyond the familiar to discover the “inside story” of another person’s biography and as a result, their own self-portraits had real substance as they compared their own lives to the stories, experiences and insights of those they interviewed. The following reports convey something of this mood:

“Interviewing these three people really gave me a new outlook on life. It made me re-evaluate who I am and what I really care about. I never really thought about the little things in life that make me happy or sad. I can learn from the things these people taught me.”

“One woman told me about hearing a young millionaire say, ‘Two things are most important when you are trying to figure out what you want to do. One is to identify something you would do even if you weren’t being paid for it. The other is to identify something that comes easy to you and is very hard for others.’”

“I was intrigued by what would stop someone from pursuing their ‘bit’. I learned that one could stop oneself with a self-imposed sense of duty to others. Financial issues and money-making ‘obligations’ to one’s family can also leave one entrenched on a road leading away from their ‘bit’. But then I learned that finding and doing your ‘bit’ is actually possible through hard work and perseverance.”

What I learned from doing the Walk Your Talk project

The purpose of this fourth and final Essay was to demonstrate that you can “walk your talk” – and then be able to describe it in the two languages of (1) English and (2) money-as-bookkeeping (accounting), including at least 5-7 transactions that involve an exchange of values; there should be money exchanged for a product or service – or some variation thereof. Show these transactions in double-entry ‘T’ accounts and then use them to create a budget based on an Income & Expense Statement and a Balance Sheet.

Student-created businesses included: handmade holiday soaps, hair braiding, customized make-up, handmade hair oils, handmade Christmas cards, origami and macrame ornaments, home-made cookies, dog-washing, dog-walking, pots of lavender seedlings, fall garden preparation service, tutoring service for classmates.

Four themes emerged from students comments about their Walk Your Talk projects: Personal Discoveries; Financial and Business Insights; Societal Issues and Social Responsibility; and Helping Others and Cooperation. Again, samples of their own words best convey their experience.

Personal Discoveries

“From this experience, I am more optimistic about the future and free from the burden of uncertainty because I have a better imagination of what is possible in the economic world.”

"I believe that I am now a little freer, as if my outlook and imagination of what could be possible has tremendously expanded."

Financial and Business Insights

"I learned to create double entries and make a financial plan. I also learned that it is easy to sell items that people are into or have a desire for."

"I have discovered a lens that lets me see where money is coming from and where it is going."

Societal Issues and Social Responsibility

"I compare what I did with what small business people are up against and I am now trying to help small businesses like 'Barber Zone' as they try to fight off the large barber shop companies like 'Great Clips'".

"I learned that an economy based on interdependent success is the kind of economy that is worthy of being a part of. My sale often led to me purchasing their product, which created a cycle of intertwined prosperity."

Helping Others and Cooperation

"I found that helping others is what I enjoy and what I plan to continue to do."

"It felt very strange to be participating in a form of business that was not centered on the ideology of creating the most profit, but was actually based on creating and maintaining relationships that mean something."

The learning outcomes exemplified in these student comments focus on developing thinking and writing skills through an engagement with economic realities. By taking on the Walk Your Talk project, students experienced the emergence of meaning, self-initiative, imagination, a sense of responsibility, practical knowledge, an appreciation for the needs and values of others, interdependence and an accomplishment-based confidence in both themselves and the other participants in their projects. Because these values had to be effectively communicated both orally and in writing, and backed up with properly formatted financial evidence (no small achievement for this age group), the overall experience was whole, alive and potentially memorable. These results were hoped for at the beginning (by me), but could not be demanded – only coaxed. The fact that they emerged at the end confirms that these students chose to take up the challenge and prove themselves able to learn the life lessons that were placed before them.



English Composition students celebrate the completion of their business initiatives.

What I learned from the course as a whole

Five major areas emerged from the students' comments and insights from the course as a whole: The Joy of Exploring, Deep Level Learning, Learning from Stories, An Expanded View of the World, and Acknowledging Personal Limitations. Once again, the students tell their own story best.

The Joy of Exploring

"I learned that I shouldn't limit myself to doing just one thing in life, but instead, explore all of my interests, because who knows, one of them may end up changing the world."

Deep Level Learning

"One of the main lessons... is not about writing at all, but about not caring so much about ourselves but to look out into the world and care about other people."

"I have learned that as a person, there are more 'me's' to discover... I have learned from all of these projects that I, myself, play an important role in life."

"I have also learned to be more compassionate and understanding... These lessons have become a part of me that I will never lose."

Learning from Stories

"The interview project made me look into my 'bit', and let me hear stories from others about how they had to work hard to get things done and not let anything stop them."

"I learned that no matter how big or small, everyone has a purpose to serve in this world and when they discover it they become a crucial part involved in many lives."

An Expanded View of the World

"I realized how each person and their purpose play an important part in the world. ... I realized how I, as a consumer, can control the economy."

My first semester of college has been a memorable experience because of this class. It has widened my view of nature and the people around me.”
“The ‘Walk Your Talk’ project broadened my viewpoint of the economy and its importance to society, while also permanently shifting the way I think about business.”

Acknowledging Personal Limitations

“My main problem with myself that I’ve realized during this class is that I spend way too much time thinking about and speculating about what I’m going to do.”
“This class showed me that I don’t think I’m ready to be an adult. I learned that I shouldn’t procrastinate or take a nap, and that you can’t run from your problems that way.”

The learning outcomes seen in these student responses revealed significant inner movement that was happening through interactions with key ideas, the world of nature and the world of people. Students were moving from passive acquiescence to active self-initiative, from rote learning to grappling with meaning, and from self alone to self in relation to others toward a common good. While their (overall high) grades continued to be based on an institutional rubric, life learning took a seat at the table and was encouraged to speak.

Conclusion

This course was an experiment in integrating the teaching of English with the teaching of how a human being makes meaning and brings it into the world through real projects that require an accounting component to make them concrete and doable. It is based on some assumptions gleaned from colleagues and fellow travelers I have had the good fortune to meet and work with along the way. A few of the assumptions are my own.

I now know from my own experience that the following can be done: to teach English Composition – the art of writing – to students in such a way that they meet up with accounting as an inevitable next step in their thinking process. In the context of discovering what it means to be a human being, a person can pursue their purpose, their “bit”, for meeting the needs of others and find themselves creating not only a good essay, but also a financial plan that brings their ideas into reality. The experience with this group of students demonstrated that it can be done; it was done as completely as the circumstances allowed; and this article is the documentation. There is no imperative that others should take it up with corresponding deeds or activities, for that is their freedom. I simply proceeded to act in such a way that no one can say it cannot be done.

To take this up is to give students the background, the writing skills and the experiences they need so they can create a plan and take an initiative to do something meaningful in a concrete and practical way. This inevitably requires transactions with others and the exchange of values. Thus, one must become financially literate. This is how the will is activated and new inner forces that attract what is needed to carry out the plan come forward – if the intent is clear and the need one perceives is genuine.

Insofar as the person's specific initiative is linked to their deeper purpose in life and is motivated by the needs of others, it then becomes essential to be literate in two ways: (1) one must be able to write up one's initiative effectively so it comes alive for others who read it; and (2) one must be able to account for the specific expenses, income and future financial flows to create one's business plan as a tool to turn the initiative into reality. In this sense, we find ourselves linked to two languages that, at this time in history, are truly universal. The language of English and the language of accounting are already in use all over the world and, when wisely put together, could easily be recognized as a new and much needed version of "bilingual education" that can give students the fundamentals for living a free, responsible and truly meaningful life in today's society.

Author

Meg Freeling is a life-long student of the human learning process and has studied it in many forms and settings. She currently teaches English composition to students at Columbus State Community College (Ohio) and teaches piano to children and adults. She has created small schools in Ohio, California and Illinois. Her career has included the design and implementation of employee-directed learning programs and the creation of job-specific learning materials for local companies. Meg's ongoing research focuses on ways for teachers to develop new levels of professional sovereignty through self-education in accounting and the emerging field of associative economics. She states: "As teachers, we need to awaken our economic selves so we can represent our educational ideas, ideals and capacities in the language of accounting. This is how we can take hold of our sleeping will and, with courage and grace, describe to the world in concrete economic terms what it will take to teach its children."

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Enabling Human Potential to Unfold Within School Environments: Education as Dialogue and Narrative at Multiple Levels

By Hartger Wassink & Shanti George

Introduction

How can a paradigm shift take place within schools, towards pedagogies that foster social connectedness as well as diversity, and away from standardised instruction? The 'Unfolding' symposium held in the Netherlands in February 2017 – hosted by NIVOZ in collaboration with the Learning for Well-being Foundation – creatively addressed these challenging questions about education today.

Inspiring examples from everyday practice in classrooms and schools served as a powerful start to each session, in the form of high-quality short videos of daily situations specially filmed for the symposium (see below). Interviews followed with the teachers and school principals who were the protagonists of the films, and then mixed tables of practitioners and academicians mulled over the themes that emerged from the films and interviews. Only thereafter was the floor given to academic experts who proved more than willing to put theory at the service of practice. (In this way, the symposium reversed conventional formats that place experts from academe in the centre, with educators and other practitioners listening and responding rather than leading.

The insights and ideas generated – through the exciting process just described – highlighted 'dialogue' and the narratives that emerged... somewhat similar to the narrative that can unfold as each child discovers meaning and potential life purpose, in the school environment and beyond it, through dialogue with the world around.

Talking about good education

The choice of dialogue as the central mode of conversation within the symposium was deliberately made, in response to the subject under discussion.

Discussing what good education entails is complicated. How can we best talk about the unfolding of human potential, what is to be desired in that process and what responsibilities emerge for educators and others? Which core concepts will help us to describe all this? Much of the complexity stems from the moral dimension that is always involved in conversations about education, and also from the nature of education as a practice. Because of these two characteristics, simple conversations around these subjects tend to be unsatisfactory. How can dialogue enable us to do justice to the moral dimensions of education as well as to the significance of education as a practice?

The example below shows how conversations on good education inevitably include a moral dimension:

If we wish children to grasp and value the diversity of the human world through teaching them geography, we have several options. We can try to increase their knowledge by asking them to learn countries and their capital cities by heart. We can teach them about diverse norms in different cultures and societies. We can invite them to assess their own culture critically, to understand differences and to develop an opinion about the desirability of those differences.

But as soon as we start telling them about countries, we are making moral choices. Is the Crimea part of Russia, or the Ukraine? Is Taiwan an independent country, or is it part of China? And what about Tibet? Why do we – from a western European perspective – regard one country with a Muslim culture as an ally and another such country as a potential enemy? Is it possible at all to compare cultures while carefully avoiding the question of whether some aspects of those cultures are better or more desirable than others, and if so better for whom?

This simple example shows that it is impossible to avoid moral questions, even with an apparently straightforward subject like geography. The complexity only increases when we take into account that many classrooms now contain diverse groups of pupils from all kinds of different backgrounds. The way a teacher approaches geography is not just about imparting objective knowledge but – critically – about how one human being relates to another with respect to their different cultural backgrounds.

The second challenge when we talk about good education is the nature of education as a practice, with teachers continually having to choose from a multitude of possibilities. In making these choices, teachers are led by some of their more or less objective aims, by their personal beliefs about what is right and by practical considerations generated by specific situations. These entangled dimensions around the imperative to act contribute to the vulnerability of the teaching profession. If we do not acknowledge the situational

complexity of education practice – for instance if we insist that discussions focus only on education based on objective facts that can be measured and compared across schools and educators – we are missing the crucial point about what makes conversations about good education so difficult. Very significantly, we are also ignoring important opportunities to improve education.

In short, if we intend to have a meaningful conversation about good education, we have to be able to exchange views and perspectives on the moral dimensions of education (which are inevitably subjective), and we have to stay as close as possible to educational practice while doing so. This is where dialogue – comes in, and why the symposium embraced it.

Dialogue and narrative

Dialogue is, literally translated, about the ‘flow of meaning.’ A dialogue differs from our regular day-to-day verbal exchanges. We are very familiar with discussions that are directed to arriving at a conclusion as quickly as possible (‘efficiently’), based usually on the practical need to accomplish something in the short term. To do this, we interrupt each other, we try to convince others about our own viewpoint, we do not ask questions in order to avoid having to explore different points of view and if we are asked a question we sometimes choose not to answer it. The person who puts forward the ‘best’ arguments or who has used the ‘smartest’ tactics, ‘wins.’ Subsequently one perspective – that represents a partial interpretation of a certain situation – gains a dominance to which the others have to adapt.

This strategy is not very helpful if we wish to discuss issues and related questions that go beyond ‘getting things done’ within a time schedule. If, for instance, the subject relates to what ‘good education’ is – what different perspectives are applicable, and how people vary in their assessment of the value of those perspectives and act accordingly – we should enter into a dialogue instead. Engaging in dialogue requires us to let go of the idea that the conversation should lead to a concrete ‘result.’ It is about making room in the conversation and to avoid closing it down as soon as possible. To achieve this, we need to ask questions instead of making statements. We need to empathise with others instead of convincing them of our viewpoint. We need to talk very carefully and to abide closely by some important guidelines, instead of intervening in the conversation when and how we see fit.

The symposium’s use of dialogue enabled safe spaces to be created within the conversations at the tables, by drawing on several elements:

- the intimate atmosphere at the tables, with ten people from varying backgrounds gathered at each round table;
- the facilitative role played by a table host chosen from among the participants;
- a short introduction to the key elements of dialogue, with several ‘focus’ questions provided for the table host to choose from in order to frame the exchange.

Since participants knew the guidelines, and especially that the aim was not to arrive at a shared conclusion, they felt comfortable about confiding personal and sometimes intimate

perceptions and experiences. The table hosts creatively followed guidelines that helped the dialogue flow around the ‘focus questions’ which were formulated in a way that would prompt people to talk about personal perspectives. On occasion, when fundamental differences were revealed, the dialogue offered a safe ‘holding space’ to explore these differences without pressure to resolve them.

With this element of dialogue built into the symposium, the conversations at the tables and in plenary sessions allowed narratives to bloom. This seems only logical in retrospect, because people give meaning to their experiences by telling stories. Narratives and stories are multidimensional in nature since we take a personal experience as a starting point to give words to how we think about a certain concept, and while we are telling our story we display our feelings in relation to events and relationships.

The point of a story is not to convince listeners, but rather to help them – and ourselves – to gain some insight into how we think and feel about a particular concept. Almost always we do this by relating an example from practice. Because it is our experience and our feelings that we are illuminating through the story, we do not have to defend ourselves. And other people can relate empathetically to the feelings we are sharing, even though their interpretation of a certain experience may differ radically from ours.

The personal narratives that were exchanged at the tables resonated in a natural way with the human emotional element that was already so real and visible in the films and in the related interviews that provided an opening impetus for each session within the symposium.

In this way, beginning with the ‘wholeness’ of the examples from everyday practice that were captured in the films, the symposium added the ‘wholeness’ of the experiences of the participants by inviting them to share their subjective personal stories, rather than reducing the richness of the filmed examples to generalisations by way of ‘objective analysis.’ A broad range of perspectives and interpretations unfolded that together formed the starting point for new insights and new shared meanings. Participants in the symposium could then better understand the complexity of the question of what good education is and they could address the paradoxes that emerge when we try to engage in creating good education in practice.

The wholeness of educational practice as captured in six short films

How can dialogue enable us to do justice to the moral dimensions of education as well as to the significance of education as a practice? We repeat this question that was posed earlier in the article, and we now propose to illustrate answers to it by drawing on six film clips that were shown at the start of sessions at the symposium. Each short film represents a dialogue with an inspiring teacher or school leader that took place within her or his everyday working environment. Each film also elicits a narrative about its protagonists that contributes to a meta-narrative about what good education is and how to create and maintain it through everyday practice. A seventh film about an inspiring teacher educator is expanded into a fuller narrative that follows in the next article and that provides an example of how the films described below could similarly be brought more fully to life. Links are

provided to each film, after a short illustration of how it illuminates dialogue and narratives around good education.

Around 25 children below the age of nine sit in a relaxed manner around their teacher, Marianne Rongen, in the Wittering primary school in the Netherlands. Fundamental to education at this school, Marianne tells us, is that children experience sufficient room in their environment to explore and learn through discovery. Marianne therefore tells the children gathered around her about the possibilities that are available for them to choose between in the coming hour – for example sliding in the indoor gym, building with blocks, carefully experimenting with liquid and solid substances in a little laboratory or working with letters and numbers. Marianne facilitates a dialogue between each child and this rich learning environment without herself directing them, and her voice remains neutral and her face receptive to the children's different responses. See <https://vimeo.com/202772864>

Dialogue around good education can also take the form of a teacher reflecting aloud – in this case to the camera – about teaching and pedagogy as experienced every day in the classroom, here by Marta Zorrilla who teaches English at the Escola Marina in Barcelona. Her face is pensive and smiling in turn as she thinks aloud about moving away from conventional methods and finding ways forward in collaboration with her pupils. The camera intersperses illustrative moments from her class in primary school where Marta interacts with children usually at shoulder-to-shoulder level. Openly and quite at ease, she talks about her struggles and what she has learned from them, alluding to a life crisis through which she gained key insights into what learning should lead to. She ends by formulating her own definition of pedagogy. See <https://vimeo.com/202777477>

In certain cases dialogue within educational arenas can establish and maintain bonds between a teacher and a class of diverse pupils. Naima Zeijveld stands at the door of her classroom in the vocational school De Hef in Rotterdam, welcoming her pupils at the start of the day, her voice altering affectionately in response to the personality of individual pupils. Elsewhere in the film, Naima talks about the need to engage emotionally with each pupil and with the class as a whole, and this is exactly what we see her do as she teaches English literature and language, her voice continuing to vary in modulation and her body movements staying lively. Her pupils speak about her to the camera with affection and respect similar to her manner with them, and Naima ends with a personal story that illustrates the intergenerational dimension of good education. See <https://vimeo.com/202768814>

The dialogue led by a school principal can also include greeting pupils at the door every morning but in a broader context than that of the classroom, as illustrated by Tom Brocks who leads the Titus Brandsma school (again in the Netherlands) for adolescents who will enter the higher educational streams. Grades at this school are far above the national average, yet for Tom the key point is that pupils like coming to school and are happy there because each one feels recognised for who he or she is and able to grow in her or his own way. Such a nurturing school environment has to be co-created through dialogue that is carried out more formally around the table – as with the student council – or relatively informally in corridors and classrooms. In a corridor conversation, this time with the camera,

Tom alludes to the vulnerabilities that have contributed to his sensitivity as a school principal. See <https://vimeo.com/202774894>

That children like coming to school is an important indication of success for inspired school leaders and teachers resonates in the film from the Ecole Singelijn in Brussels, in a primary school setting where young children express pleasure both through body language and vocally. Dominique Paquot, the school principal, describes how the vital dialogue between school and home is embedded in daily pedagogical practice as well as in occasional difficult conversations with parents, for example over the inclusion in class of a child with special learning needs. Dominique talks about his own reading difficulties as enhancing his sensitivity as school principal (echoing Tom Brocks in the previous film) rather than reducing his effectiveness. Teachers in the school speak – as Dominique does – of their pedagogy as a reaction to their childhood experience in conventional schools. See <https://vimeo.com/202893317>

School leadership as a dialogue about shared responsibility is exemplified by the primary school Laterna Magica in Amsterdam. School principal Annette van Valkengoed introduces us to the pedagogical principles that underpin the school's activities, after which several pupils of varying ages as well as a couple of teachers illustrate their co-responsibility in translating these principles into daily school practice. Co-responsibility spans a tapestry of myriad tasks, whether making sandwiches for the younger children or deciding on school policy. To take responsibility for any task involves demonstrating relevant abilities and experience, as when three children narrate how they qualified through job interviews to act as carers for the school pets. Mutual awareness of each one's tasks and responsibilities imbues this orchestra of co-responsibility with zest, energy and flow. See <https://vimeo.com/202771191>

Conclusion: meaning and purpose as embedded in dialogue and narrative

Meaningful conversations about good education – as noted earlier – require an inevitably subjective exchange of views and perspectives on the moral dimensions of education, staying as close as possible to the situational complexity of educational practice. Such conversations should ideally take the form of dialogue rather than debate or confrontation. Each of the films described above constituted such a dialogue, whether between:

- children and their learning environment,
- pedagogy and lived experience in a teacher's life,
- diverse adolescents in a vocational school and a teacher who lets them know that she truly cares,
- a school principal and the school environment that he hopes to render as responsive and meaningful as possible for pupils,
- teachers and their principal who share a vision of a school setting that is far richer than the narrow pedagogy they themselves experienced as children, or

- members of a school community who together constitute an orchestra of shared responsibility for joint life-broad learning.

All six short films together could be seen as entering into a larger implicit dialogue among themselves about the many faces and dimensions of good education, feeding into the wider dialogue at the symposium about what lies at the heart of teacher – pupil relationships and at the heart of school leadership – towards providing the fertile ground of significant relationships that can nourish each schoolchild’s sense of meaning and unique life purpose.

Background to this article:

The films of inspiring everyday practice in schools that were highlighted in this article were produced by Nickel van der Vorm and Merel Boon of NIVOZ.

The protagonists in the films – Marianne Rongen, Marta Zorrilla, Naima Zeijpveld, Tom Brocks, Dominique Paquot and Annette van Valkengoed (names are given in the order in which the film segments were discussed in the article) and also Maaïke Nap who writes elsewhere in this issue – were interviewed at the symposium by Luis Manuel Pinto of the Learning for Well-being Foundation and Hartger Wassink of NIVOZ. These interviews can be found on audio-track via this webpage/link:

<http://nivoz.nl/4835-2/unfolding-human-potential/videoclips-and-interviews/>

Summaries of the interviews by Carm Barten who studies pedagogical theory at the University of Amsterdam can also be found there.

Related reflections are provided by [Linda O’Toole](#) and [Daniel Kropf](#) who represent the Learning for Well-being Foundation and [Luc Stevens](#) on behalf of the NIVOZ Foundation, the two organisations that co-hosted the ‘Unfolding’ symposium.

On the [symposium’s website](#) you will find participants’ views and insights, video talks, audio-tracks, drawings, pictures and much more, in the subpages in the right column of the website.

Maaïke Nap who featured in the seventh film (not covered in this article) gives her perspective on dialogue and narrative in the article that follows.

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What Lies at the Heart of Teacher Education? Boxes Within Boxes, Worlds Within Worlds, Seeing and Being Seen

By Maaïke Nap

Introduction

As a teacher educator, I tell trainee teachers that their starting point should be each pupil – not the lesson plan, nor the books.

Try and see the encounter in the classroom, I urge them, from the perspective of the individual pupil as you engage with her or him. How does the pupil experience this moment within education, in the here and now? What experiences and emotions has he or she brought from the world outside and what perceptions are uppermost in her or his mind today as the lesson proceeds?

These questions – I could explain to trainee teachers, if I were to think aloud in their presence – are questions that I am asking myself right now with respect to all of you, because I have to try to be your role model in this. My relationship to you provides a sort of mirror image of your relationship to pupils in the classrooms where you carry out your practice lessons and where you will one day be fully qualified teachers. I ask you about your needs and intentions and the dreams that you bring to your education here and I hope that this will move you to ask the same of pupils in classrooms. (Such a relationship resembles the Chinese boxes that fit inside each other – my relationship with trainee teachers encompasses their relationship with pupils in their classes.)

Tremendous courage is required if you take each individual pupil as a starting point, because this is an exploration of the unknown -- you have to let go of the lesson plan as the map that you can be certain of because you created it and you know it thoroughly. You become vulnerable, as you enter into dialogue and shared reflection, as you search

together for answers, as you acknowledge doubts and uncertainties and sometimes even failure. I bring myself as a whole person to classroom encounters in order to encourage trainee teachers in turn to engage as whole persons so that they will in the future reach out to their pupils as whole persons. This is my experience of worlds within worlds – the worlds of individual children, of individual trainee teachers and of individual teacher educators. Often treated as separate worlds, they can and must interlock through moments of open human contact.

'Do you see me?'

One of the exercises with trainee teachers that I like to use is to ask them to form small groups and to discuss a video clip that zooms in on one particular child within a classroom. The trainee teachers share with me their perceptions of the child, after which they inevitably ask me if they were 'right' and if their impressions were 'correct.' I tell them that there are no correct answers and that the essence of being a teacher is to relate to each child as a being in himself or herself, with an unfolding meaning and purpose that is distinctive to her or him alone.

This however was not my own experience from my time as a pupil in school. We were expected to work in silence and as individuals, and my school report cards were full of complaints that I was too talkative. Secondary school only increased my feeling of not being 'seen' by my teachers as a person in my own right. When I graduated from school, my teachers asked me what profession I planned to go into and they were startled by my answer – 'A teacher.' They expected that answer from model pupils who sat in the first row and dutifully noted down all that the teacher said, without chatting with classmates or exchanging silly notes with them as I did.

Yet I was sure that I wanted to be a teacher, at the same time that I rejected the prevalent model of 'a good teacher' and 'a good pupil.' From early on, my mother remembers, when people asked me about my future plans my reply was that I would become a teacher and a mother. As a child, I loved to enact scenes from home and school with dolls.

I was fortunate that my parents did 'see' me for who I was, from my early years onwards. They did the same for my brother as well. When he did not excel academically, they refrained from pressurising him to work harder at school. Instead they found activities outside school that encouraged his interest in art and craftwork. Today he has found his place within the profession of design.

Similarly, when I graduated from university, my parents brought to the celebration a book they had compiled of poems I had written as a child and a collection of my playful notes to classmates. I tell trainee teachers that they have to learn to 'read' each individual child as a distinctive person. My parents' compilation of my poems was an expression of how they had truly 'read' me.

Home and school

When I left home to train as a teacher, I moved from the town where I had grown up to the city of Nijmegen (where I have lived ever since). Residing in a small student room was more than compensated for by the wide horizons of pedagogy that teacher training opened up for me. I felt confirmed in my choice of profession despite my difficulties as a pupil in secondary school.

My subdued rebelliousness in school made me sympathetic to children who were considered 'troublesome.' As a trainee teacher, I worked with groups of children who had been given this label. I tried to 'read' each one of them. I talked with one boy until I realised that his restiveness in class was related to the closely printed pages of his mathematics book. I created an alternative book of maths exercises for him, with only one sum to work out on every page. This took me considerable time, and the boy's changed attitude to maths and to school more generally was truly rewarding.

After teacher training, I studied 'Family pedagogy' at the University of Nijmegen. Children do not experience school and home as separate worlds, and both teachers and parents can only 'read' a child fully if their perspective integrates home with school. As a teacher educator I have learned a lot from my two sons and from my husband who teaches in a Montessori school.

My four-year-old son can be frustrated and angry when events do not go according to plan. I have no magic formula to offer him. I can only support him in finding small steps that can help him move forward from frustration. 'How can I help you?' I ask him. I was happy when he responded, 'If you stay calm, that helps me.'

His older brother is seven-years old and full of questions about the school system. Why is his class divided into three reading groups according to ability? When the national tests are taken in the classroom, why does his class have to work as individuals and why is helping each other strictly forbidden? 'Helping people is something we should do, isn't it...?'

A new generation of pupils and parents have stimulated change in classrooms and schools, so that my memories of life in school are no longer true for my sons. Parents are not ready anymore to leave children at the school door in the morning and then collect them from the door at the end of the school day. At my sons' school – admittedly based on non-conventional pedagogy – the school week opens and closes with parents present in the classroom.

The world beyond

After my university studies and before I took up employment, I travelled for five months in Thailand, Indonesia and that region. I knew that my life and work would be in the Netherlands, and I wanted to glimpse the wider world. I had no formal study plan for my travels, but children were very visible in the countries that I visited. I was intrigued to note the similarities between the games that children played in cultures that were familiar to me

as well as those that were very distant. Most striking were the abilities of children in the region to entertain themselves and each other for long periods in activities that had strong learning potential, on the basis of very few material objects and in informal groups of mixed ages. Later, Peter Gray's book *Free to Learn* brought this back to me.

I too found it liberating to travel with a bare minimum of material things, just one set of clothes on my body and a clean set in my backpack. I am able to recreate this experience for my family when we camp in the European countryside in the summer, living in a tent with as few things as possible and enjoying the natural environment as fully as we can, with my sons' play resembling that of the children I saw in Thailand and Indonesia.

When I returned to the Netherlands, I was happy to be employed at the institution where I had trained as a teacher, and my task was to observe and guide trainee teachers during their practice lessons in schools. This was an opportunity to give each such trainee teacher the feeling of being 'seen' as a person developing a feel for the chosen profession of working with children in schools, and not as someone being forced to conform to the single template of 'a good teacher' that was applicable to every trainee. I was not much older than the teacher trainees that I worked with and I think that this enabled an open relationship. When I meet these former trainees, they still speak warmly of the written observations that I provided after their practice lessons. I hope that the experience has given them a sense of being seen that they will share with their pupils.

The pedagogical moment

In due course I joined the faculty and was given responsibility for teaching pedagogy, a role that continues until today. I introduced exercises such as the following one, captured here on film:

Trainee teachers look into each other's eyes – in pairs – in order to fully experience what it means to see, to be seen, to show oneself and to feel that one is being truly seen by another. The ensuing discussion among trainees then broadens the perspective beyond eye contact, to the establishment of significant intuitive connections between teacher and pupil. See <https://vimeo.com/202752047>

I try and integrate my classes in pedagogy with the teaching of other subjects, with collaboration proving more effective when colleagues share the perspective that teacher education goes far beyond the mastery of content to developing sensitivity to each child in the classroom. My collaboration with the drama teacher, for example, allows the here and now in individual experience to come alive within our shared class. An integrated curriculum draws separate subjects together in a wholeness that can fully support trainee teachers in their learning processes and that should resonate with respect and openness for the individuals who are learning.

Some trainee teachers come to class with the intention of 'learning as much as possible,' which equates to leaving at the end with their exercise books full of notes. Once during a class I asked trainee teachers to grade at various moments how involved they were with

what was going on in class. When they showed their 'graphs' to me, they expected that I would compare it with the norm. I then explained that there is no norm and that each pupil in their classroom will have an individual trajectory of engagement with the proceedings during the class. A valuable discussion followed, during which the trainee teachers realised that patterns of involvement and temporary inattention had less to do with the merits of the class that I was presenting than with individual rhythms and preoccupations. They identified their different patterns with skills and insights that rendered them my colleagues in shared learning, through teamwork that was very different from conventional teacher-student hierarchies. Such an exercise opened their eyes to possible patterns of attention and inattention among their prospective pupils. This is an example of what I call the 'pedagogical moment,' of learning together that includes my continuing education, allowing me too to show vulnerability in an environment within which mutual trust has been built so that I can share my hesitations when moving forward with the trainee teachers.

Education is not about learning the 'right' answers. It is about paying attention to and valuing people's diverse learning processes, stimulating a dialogue between the learner and his or her environment. The teacher educator's contribution is to trust in the different potential that every trainee teacher – and every pupil in a classroom – brings with her or him, and to ensure that each person feels recognised in who they are and what they bring in their distinctive rhythms based on individual experience and interests. Pedagogical concepts are best absorbed when a trainee teacher can relate them to life experiences that touch the emotions. Learning is not imposed from outside but comes alive within, when both student and teacher take shared responsibility for the situated learning process and when both are fully present as whole persons, alert and sensitive to the possibilities of the moment, responding to questions and to the human being behind the questions. Teachers (and teacher educators) accompany each learner on her or his unique journey of unfolding potential, stopping together occasionally to consult or to draw attention to the moment, asking questions of each other and continually seeking new questions.

(Maaïke was a key participant in the Unfolding conference that is the subject of the previous article in this issue. Dutch readers can follow Maaïke's ideas further in <http://www.scienceguide.nl/201706/uitnodigen-tot-ontwikkeling.aspx>)

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Maaïke Nap is responsible for pedagogy and related curriculum development at the College of Education for primary school teachers attached to the Hogeschool Arnhem Nijmegen, which is a university for applied sciences in the Netherlands. Her pedagogical vision is one of transformative learning through personal learning trajectories for which teachers and students share responsibility.

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Learning for Freedom and Well-being: Reflections About Unfolding our Unique Potential

By Alberto Paganini & Els Laenens

Alberto's story

School frustration and longing for freedom and well-being

On 7 April 1974 my long and beautiful journey in the uplifting fields of learning for freedom and well-being began. We were celebrating my 17th Birthday in Bolzano, a beautiful city surrounded by mountains in the north of Italy. A 'crazy' and hopeful idea filled the minds of most of the students of our class at the high school for science. We were 23 young, intelligent, vital, creative and courageous students, struggling between the joy of having vibrant interests and wanting to discover our highest potential, and old school structures which suffocated our creativity and joy in learning. Liberation from old paradigms and imposed school learning became a necessity for us. It was a kind of last hope of being and becoming ourselves, in a world that demanded we betray our deepest self, aspirations and dreams.

On a week-long school trip in the beautiful Dolomite mountains we experienced the uplifting power of being in harmony in a sincere and open community with nature. We discovered common interests, beautiful dreams, projects hidden in our hearts and a deep interest in learning how to live in harmony with each other and with nature. We shared with each other our aspirations for living in a just, healthy and happy world, whose goal would be the development of the human potential of each of us with respect and love for the resources of nature.

For me it was a revelation to learn that none of us were happy with the way we lived and learned at school.

Learning for Freedom and Well-being:
Reflections About Unfolding our Unique Potential

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'Why wait until after the diploma to be free? Why wait to be an adult to be myself? Why not here and now? We have to be at school so why not learn about what really interests us, like the deep meaning of our life and how to co-create our happiness and freedom in a beautiful world? Why not take our sources of inspiration, wisdom and consciousness from history, religion, poetry, arts, philosophy and science instead of from boring subjects that more or less unhappy teachers try to instil in our brains? Mankind's development is full of people who looked for liberation and happiness, who realised the meaning of life, and broke deep-rooted and restricting rules. Why are the needs, dreams, feelings and aspiration of all the beautiful young students suppressed at school? Is school not meant to be there for our development and inner growth?'

For the next two hours we discussed how we would like to be and how we would learn from this moment on. We came up with some wonderful ideas. We would stay in the circle and with open hearts we would invite teachers to collaborate with us in our experiment. Students would work in groups, according to their interest and attitudes: they would research on the chosen subjects, with or without the help of teachers, and would report the result of their work to the rest of the class in creative ways. We would cover the year's curriculum, but in a nice and creative way. School is not meant to make us suffer but to enjoy learning: this was one of our mottoes.

The teachers were divided, some followed our ideas with enthusiasm; others vigorously tried to restore 'order'. We studied more intensely than ever before: cooperation instead of competition, loving relations, interdisciplinary research, open minds, open hearts and fresh eyes opened up infinite sources of inspiration and joy in our learning. We were invited for interviews and conferences to present our work and ideas. We became famous and respected all over Italy, becoming widely known as IV C, and we grew enormously as individuals and as a group in those days. Our parents, after their initial doubts, helped us, and so too did the students, workers and most teachers of the school.

From then on, each one of us has been motivated to look for his or her unique way in life. We still meet each other occasionally and we value this time as a precious milestone in our life.

Els' story

IV C is a living example of the following quote by Peter Senge (Senge, 2006). 'We all know that the education for the 21st century must change profoundly from the education of the 19th and 20th centuries. This requires space for innovation, not just pressures for performance. Young people are acutely aware of this. They know they need to grow up as citizens of the world. [...] And, the young people are eager to be part of this. The real question is, "Are we?"'

Different levels of education

Alberto's story beautifully illustrates the different levels of education as distinguished by MIT action researchers Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer within the framework of theory U (Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). The old way of educating is found in Education

1.0 which is input-centred, authority-centred and teacher-driven, and in Education 2.0 which is outcome-centred and testing-driven. Education 3.0 is student-centred and learning-driven, where teachers turn into study coaches. In Education 4.0 learners get opportunities to realise their highest potential and access their authentic sources of creativity, knowing and entrepreneurship. IV C were not given this opportunity, but they co-created it. They sensed the need for new learning environments and no longer wished to allow the old paradigms of education to dominate their learning.

My childhood education

My parents really wanted their very best for me. And they succeeded in their goal: I became **their** very best although I often felt that I wanted to become **my** very best. I tried at least eight times to bring about a major correction or change in my educational journey in an attempt to bring it more in line with my learning desires. But they considered themselves as the authority (Education 1.0) and the experts (Education 2.0): 'we are adults and teachers, you are only a child, we know what is best for you, therefore we decide for you.' It was so clear to them that this was for my own best interest, but I remember my frustration as a child when I wanted to learn something and was not allowed to or when I heard for the umpteenth time 'that's for later, you are too young for that.'

During our secondary education my peers and I received a brilliant scientific education from the best teachers in all subjects in order to be well prepared for the most difficult studies at university. Besides school, I was part of an intensive national training programme for talented young tennis players. But I fell ill – glandular fever with complications – so I had to stop playing tennis and missed most of the last year of school, which was indispensable for studying mathematics at university, according to my teachers and the system. My doctor gave me the status of 'tourist' at school, meaning that I could decide for myself, whether or not to go and when to arrive and leave. I found this freedom very enjoyable after 13 years of strict school timetables. My teachers saw two options: either I would repeat the year, or I would go to university unprepared, knowing that I would have to repeat the first year of mathematics. I chose the second option. To their surprise, I passed all the exams at the end of my 'tourist' year and passed my first year university exams – one of only four out of 84 who succeeded in the first year examinations. How was that possible? Maybe my year as a tourist was the key to success. It gave me time to breathe, relax, reflect and study without any imposed tasks or pressure. I was given a holding space in which I could meet myself.

Our children's education

When I was pregnant I started reading about different educational approaches to prepare myself to make a conscious school and education choice. In Waldorf education, we found more than we were looking for, an education firmly rooted in an inspiring philosophy of human development. This is the education we wanted for our children, both at home and at school. The work of the educator and social innovator Rudolf Steiner has inspired our parenting ever since.

With full confidence in our choice, we sent our son Beniamino to the local Waldorf school. However, at the age of 11 in 5th grade, he gave us several wake-up calls. First, he was an

unhappy child after school and when he said ‘for you it is easy to be always kind and loving, but you always send me to that gang at school ...,’ we understood that he perceived his environment at school as not very favourable. The second was that he and his peers did extremely badly at a math and language test designed for 4th graders organised by an external centre for student support. We started looking at Beniamino’s school situation with fresh eyes and saw that his teacher was applying an Education 1.0 approach while claiming to follow Education 3.0. Moreover, the relationships in the class were very poor. Together with the anthroposophical¹ school medical doctor we decided that Beniamino should not stay any longer in this socially sick environment. He needed a different environment to develop and flourish. The solution we found was to let him stay at home for the last 3 months of the school year and then let him join the 7th grade with a different teacher and other peers, after the summer holiday. Beniamino was so happy to hear this – a weight was lifted from his shoulders. The three months at home turned out to be the first episode of his self-schooling journey. Studying at home was fun and efficient, and there was plenty of time for his ‘projects’ and for play. He started to bloom again. He evolved from a bad student in 5th grade to an excellent 7th grader in 3 months of following his own learning path instead of 13 months of school – a fascinating and inspiring experience for all of us. In 7th grade, he grew in confidence in a good social atmosphere. But near the end of the school year, our next wake-up call came. ‘Mum and Dad, if you don’t mind that by the time I am 18 and finish school, I will not be capable of doing many things, then you just have to continue letting me go to school’. He wanted and needed plenty of time for his musical development and several attempts to find a solution at school had failed.

What he missed so desperately at school was someone who was interested in him as a person, someone who would take his learning wishes into account (Education 3.0 and 4.0) and who would aim for the highest future possibilities. We were faced with the huge gap between our experience with this Waldorf school and our ideal, the original Waldorf intention, as described in Steiner’s work (Education 4.0-driven).

With no other Waldorf school in the neighbourhood, we decided to take Beniamino out of school. Our home schooling became home self-education in the Steiner sense. ‘Essentially, there is no education other than self-education, whatever the level may be. Every education is self-education, and as teachers we can only provide the environment for children’s self-education. We have to provide the most favourable conditions where, through our agency, children can educate themselves according to their own destinies.’ (Steiner, 1996), and ‘Where is the book in which the teacher can read about what teaching is? The children themselves are this book. We should not learn to teach out of any book other than the one lying open before us and consisting of the children themselves.’ (Steiner, 2004). In a materialistic approach, a young child is considered to be an empty book, so Education 1.0 and 2.0 are the natural choices to make. But there is another approach to education, considering children as The Book for their education brings us to Education 3.0 and 4.0. We need to ‘read’ the children with an open curious mind, a compassionate heart and a courageous will, to find out that their book is not empty at all and that it helps us to help

¹ Anthroposophic medicine is an integrative approach to medicine developed by Rudolph Steiner in the 1920s. For more information see: <http://www.anthroposophy.org.uk/pages/medicine.php>

them. They are our guides in our educational tasks. As a parent, I experience myself as a student of my children; as a professor, as a student of my university students. In Education 3.0 and 4.0 we all become teachers and learners of one another.

When our daughter, Chiara, informed us – halfway through 5th grade – that she preferred not to go to school anymore, the decision to allow her to follow a personalised learning path, as her brother did, was easier to make. We had noticed that she had started to lose herself at school and that she needed more and more time after school to reconnect. Just like Beniamino, Chiara is an enthusiastic self-schooler. Yet their approaches are completely different as illustrated below.

Children need educators who create spaces for their learning and development in which they can follow their own paths. Below we give you a flavour of the personalised learning environments of our kids – both during their years at school and during self-schooling – It is worth noting that in the formal school system they each had teachers (both at school and art school) who attempted to develop in them ‘better’ ideas: Beniamino was required to learn to listen to music rather than play it and Chiara was told to drop her dreams of creating a musical because they were not feasible and far too challenging for a 15-year old. In contrast to these Education 1.0 and 2.0 reactions, Education 4.0 treasures such co-created environments, allowing for the integrated development of intellectual intelligence, emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence, and resulting in a remarkable enthusiasm for learning. They even show great interest and a lively study approach to the subjects imposed by the Flemish Examination Commission for those who want to obtain a high school degree.

Beniamino and his Baroque music

For his 12th birthday party, Beniamino’s friends from the music academy brought their instruments with them. After each gave a short performance, they continued playing and exploring music together; when they started playing *Pachelbel’s canon*, the field in the room shifted. Their concentration and enthusiasm grew when they started to realise – to their surprise – ‘wow, we can play this all by ourselves!’ After this experience, Beniamino developed the idea of performing Christmas concerts in baroque style with a group of children. He ‘founded’ his ensemble and choir Musica Gloria and motivated peers to join. He had been directing the best orchestras on cd in our living room for years, but directing a group of children with limited musical experience – some of them older than himself – turned out to be a very challenging learning experience for a 12-15-year old, especially because he did not want to direct with a baton, but to conduct while he himself played the harpsichord, the organ, the flute or the recorder. After school the children of Musica Gloria rehearsed in our living room, singing and playing the harpsichord, violin, cello, contrabass, harp, flute, recorder and oboe. In addition, Beniamino created flyers, posters, programmes including songs for the audience to sing along to, and a presentation of the Christmas story linking all the music in their programme. With their baroque music, singing, story-telling and theatre, the members of Musica Gloria created an exceptionally warm, intimate and wonderful atmosphere which, to their great delight touched the audience deeply. They performed this concert for four consecutive years and received a very enthusiastic reception from the 200–300 people in the audience – mostly families with children. The adults were

astonished at what a group of young children was able to co-create. This is an example of what Alberto and I have seen happen when children are supported in taking leadership of their own learning – becoming entrepreneurs in their self-education journeys.

Chiara taking care of, and teaching little friends

Chiara has always loved taking care of little children. Children love to be with her. When she was 7, a friend of ours asked her to help with her toddler and newborn baby. With the baby on her lap, Chiara played with the toddler. The parents and I were amazed at how naturally she could create a happy and secure environment in which children (and parents) got what they needed: peaceful play, food, drinks and loads of loving care. Aged 9 she prepared herself when going to play with little friends by filling a bag with materials for age-appropriate activities that she had found in my books on Waldorf education. She always seemed to know how to create an atmosphere in which she and the children could thrive. Parents told us that she had given them inspiration for the healthy education of their children.

After a year of self-schooling, Chiara started talking about creating a children's choir with friends. Shortly after, her former Waldorf teacher, asked her to help with the weekly choir lessons in her second grade. For three years, Chiara led the weekly choir lessons in grades 2 to 4, together with the teacher. When she was 13, she wanted to create a children's yoga week during Alberto's yoga week. Every day she organised a 3-hour children's yoga session with story-telling, music and play. Chiara finds teaching opportunities wherever she goes. She has been enjoying giving lessons to young friends in lyre, recorder, piano, violin, music theory and yoga.

Her most challenging project emerged last September when she started planning a performance of the *Wizard of Oz*. Chiara involved two mothers and two elementary school children in the Theory U case clinic methodology – a practice in which a group of people opens up at all levels around an issue, observes with open minds, looks at it with fresh eyes, senses from the field and allows the highest future possibility to emerge. As a consequence, Chiara's performance has become the project of a local school community, grades 1-6. She has been making detailed plans for the scripts, the music, the songs and the play. The teachers and the children are creating the set; parents are taking care of the costumes. For the first rehearsal period, Chiara was invited to work at school with the children every afternoon for 3 weeks, preparing for the big performance in October 2017 in the theatre hall.

Concluding remarks

We have experienced over and over again that all adults – including Alberto and myself – who witnessed Beniamino's and Chiara's self-education stories are flabbergasted by what all these kids – their friends also – did, how they did it, and how it emerged from within themselves. I remember friends telling me 'This kind of education works for Beniamino because he is such a special child, but it obviously will not work for Chiara who is very different'. Now that it also works for Chiara, they say 'It works for your children, but they are exceptions. It wouldn't work for other children.' Fortunately, our children made me realise

that university students also need space for self-education in order to flourish. And indeed, providing them with learning environments focused on self-education, turned out to make a major difference to their motivation, self-regulation and sense of well-being (Laenens, Stes, Hofkens, Vandervieren, & Van Petegem, 2016; Laenens, Vandervieren, Hofkens, Stes, & Van Petegem, 2017). Did it work for all of them? No, it did not. And for those students, the major obstacles seemed to be their educational past or a wrong study choice, As Einstein said: 'The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education.' and 'Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.'

From my experiments, experiences and research – at home, school and university – I came to understand that more freedom (in the curriculum, in learning outcomes, in school timetables), less external pressure and a transformed (Education 4.0) relationship between learners and teachers, improves learning and student well-being, and that the sooner a child can learn in such learning environments, the better for their development. Yes, we still need Education 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0, but not as dominating paradigms, an Education 4.0 teacher or educator will sense at any moment and in any situation which of these are to be applied for the highest or best future possibility of all involved.

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Giving a Space for Me to be Me – Parenting with Intention

By Agnetha Stagling Birgersson

Introduction

Parenting is probably one of the most thought expanding and maturing experiences we will ever have, if we allow it to be. Often we think of parenting as a way we protect, guide and direct children but it is much more than that. I cannot think of a better course in personal development than being a parent. Parenting automatically brings with it a way to get to know new parts of ourselves. Parenting is a way in which to fulfill, expand and express our own unique potential as well as the child's.

Parenting is a wonderful, but also challenging experience for most of us. Children have a tendency to push "buttons" that has never been pushed before and awakening powers inside that we did not know existed.

Have you ever been in a situation when somebody did or said something to your child that you could see really hurt? That is when the Mama Lion or the Papa Lion comes out, ready to "kill."

Have you ever lost your temper over a 2-3-year-old who wants an ice cream NOW, or a 5-year-old who tells you to shut up, because you are disturbing his game? Many simple everyday situations that are so common as a parent can sometimes be very challenging. We all lose our temper sometimes.

If we are tired, stressed or wound up from a busy day at work, our buttons are easily pushed and we say and do things that we later regret.

Three of my grandchildren were a little bored one day and decided to check out what my daughter had in the refrigerator. Maybe there would be something they could use to play with. They found two packages with eggs. "Hmmm, what can we do with these?" They decided to throw them first at the cabinets and then at each other. They had a lot of fun

doing it until my daughter came into the kitchen and found about 20 eggs smashed all over the kitchen and the boys soaked in egg yolk and egg white.

What would you have done?

Well, I am glad that it was not me, because I do not think that I would have been able to laugh with them and acknowledge their creativity and fun. Thinking about it now makes me smile and wish I would let more of the child in me loose, to be wild and crazy. Wouldn't that be hilarious, to throw eggs at each other?

Young children are so much in the moment and they have a wonderful way of enjoying each moment, often until we, as adults, walk in. But they have no sense of what the consequences will be when they are young. As adults we are often much more focused on the behavior and the consequences, than being in the moment.

Very often the wild and crazy within us, and the being-in-the moment dies or is numbed out when we are still quite young. Grown-ups react to the "fun" and to our being in a way that makes us feel criticized or ashamed. Early on, we learn how to "hide" those parts of ourselves that we experience as not ok, by the way adults respond to them.

I do NOT mean that we should encourage children to throw eggs at each other, especially not in the kitchen, or at all for that matter, but a part of me giggles over the creativity and being-in-the-moment-feeling it gives me. How about you? Can you feel that?

I think many of us have lost touch with that feeling.

There is nothing more powerful for our being than to be allowed to be who we are. So how can we, as parents, allow our children to be who they are without losing our mind or giving up? Is there really a way to nurture the "being" and guiding the "doing" in ways that keep us alive inside, to realize our full potential, not only while children, but through life?

Well, if there is, the power is in the hands of parents and other nurturing adults that interact with our children. How can we parent with intention – giving space for the child to be who he or she is without losing our own boundaries and our own integrity?

I think that we are all born with an inherited potential, a core Self. The core Self is who we really are, our unique potential. Then each one of us has a body, and a physical, mental and emotional system, through which our core Self is or can be expressed. This system is an organized, purposeful structure that consists of interrelated and independent elements. Under optimal circumstances both the Self and the System are integrated and connected and our unique potential can be realized.

The Self, however is very vulnerable and the system is wired for survival and will do anything to protect the Self from harm or hurt. This is a good thing, but it is also potentially difficult. To simplify the concept, we can say that there is a protective and flexible shield

that will protect the Self as soon as there is any threat, real or imagined. When the threat is gone, the system relaxes and the shield goes back.

When we are insecure or stressed or when we experience pain, the threat system is activated and our “heart” closes, to protect the Self. When we feel safe and secure the system relaxes and our heart opens. The thing is that the system has no idea what is real and what is imagined. It is not reality that shapes us. It is how we experience reality that shapes us.

We face every situation in life with either an open heart or a closed heart, depending on our personality and genes and our created world view.

When our threat system is activated, all the energy is used to protect. As long as the threat system is activated (closed heart), very little learning or no learning at all is taking place. The system is focused on keeping us safe and alive. The system is very creative. It can keep us safe by having us lie, making up really good stories, accusing others, avoiding dealing with the situation and so on. The list can be long. It is our system that is trying to keep us safe, but it is usually not good for our integrity and for our relationship with ourselves and others. We become disconnected, from our core Self and from others.

I have worked with parents and children for over 35 years. Through the years I have seen many examples of how we often address a situation with a closed heart. With a closed heart it is impossible for our unique potential to be realized. I have dedicated my work to helping parents understand these mechanisms, so that we can all realize our full potential, both as adults and children.

To make sense of our experiences, to create meaning and to learn, mature and to realize our full potential, children need an open heart. We all do. The key is to create an environment that allows the heart to be open and to help the child make sense of the world, both on the inside and the outside. This is not an easy thing but it is possible if we raise our awareness.

Parenting with intention means that I become aware of my own system, my own needs, my own boundaries and my Self. It means that I act instead of react, guided by values that are important to me. It means that I see beyond the behavior and see the human in my child and myself. It means that I see that we are the same, unique human beings sharing a space. We are the same, but uniquely different.

This is not easy and it is a job that takes a lifetime, but it is very enriching and life sustaining.

For most of us we go about life, working and everything else we do, on “auto-pilot”. There is not much reflection and not much intention or awareness of why we do what we do. To live a life with intention and to parent with intention we need to raise our awareness, reflect on the purpose and values that we hold sacred and dear, and start living our lives in accordance with those.

If we go back to the children and the egg situation and use that as an example, how could we think and how could we act?

1. PAUSE – do not react on your feelings!

The situation will trigger different thoughts and feelings in different parents. By itself, the situation is just a trigger: it is experienced through your filter (personality, genetics, experiences from the past and the way you now “see” the world). This will create your feelings. Emotions are what move us and your feelings will move you to take action. Most of us act on our feeling – we REACT. To be able to ACT *with intent* we need to practice pausing, maybe take some deep breaths, reflect, raise our level of awareness, connect with ourselves, acknowledge whatever feelings are there and then act with intention. Sometimes, if the situation triggers very strong feelings that are hard to handle we might need to leave the situation for a while and then come back to it.

2. Try to look at it from different perspectives

For the most part we see a situation solely from our own perspective and REACT accordingly or sometimes we see it solely from the child’s/children’s perspective and REACT accordingly. The key is to see different perspectives and then choose how you want to ACT and what values you want to act according to. Sounds tricky or maybe impossible? Well, it is, for most of us, in the beginning. With practice it becomes more of a habit and it will become easier and easier to pause. In the beginning you probably will not pause until it is too late, *after* you have reacted on your feelings. That is a good start. Then you reflect, look at different perspectives, look at the values that you want as a guide in your life and think about how you would like to act next time something similar comes up.

If your reaction did some damage, you need to go back and repair whatever relational (emotional), physical or material damage you did when you reacted.

In our example of the egg throwing, what would the children’s perspective be? Can you see it?

We do not know of course, but we can guess.

This is what I guess:

They are exploring to see if there is anything exciting to do. One of them or all of them, come up with the idea to look in the refrigerator, to see if there is anything interesting in there. They see the eggs and come up with a really fun idea. What if we throw them? What will happen then? It sounds like a great idea. Let’s try it. They start throwing and they see the eggs splash against the cabinet doors. Splash.....Splash..... Their curiosity guides them and they are totally lost in the thrill of it. They giggle and laugh and now start throwing eggs at each other. They

are not doing it to annoy their parents. They are only in the here and now – having a lot of fun. Not thinking of how hard it will be to clean up or how upset mom or dad might be, at least until mom or dad shows up.

Mom's or dad's perspective will probably be very different. My system would say: "Alarm, alarm, alarm! Messy kitchen, messy kids, lots of work, I do not have time for this, I do not want to do this. I do not want them to play with food." If I was tired or stressed my thoughts might be: "Why do they do this to me? They never listen. They are always up to something. Playing with food is not okay. Twenty eggs, nothing for breakfast" and so on. This is all coming from a closed heart, protecting my own perspective.

I would have had a very hard time seeing the fun, the joy and the "life" in it.

Maybe my first feelings would have been anger, deep frustration and I think I would have felt very provoked. What about you? What would be your perspective?

Coming from this perspective it would be very likely that I would act in a way that would disconnect me from both myself and the children. It would be likely that I would use a tone of voice and words that were harsh and maybe shaming and maybe I would have pulled an arm or two, maybe too hard. Looking at it now, I can only feel the joy, the excitement, the fun and the "life". But I know that taking this attitude would have been very difficult for me, in the situation.

3. Connect with your feelings, and own your feelings

My feelings are my feelings. They are not anybody else's feelings. I have them and I need to take responsibility for them. So, allowing the feelings to be there without RE-ACTING on them is the key. Connect with yourself. If you need to leave the situation for a while, do so. Breathe. And come back when you have connected with yourself. This is when you can be authentic and genuine in how you act in the situation.

There is not a given answer to what the best solution would be or the right behavior would be. There would be very many different ways of acting in a way that took the perspective of all parties into consideration. But when you are in a reactive mode you will not be able to do that and very often the result will be disconnection, maybe shame and children that obey out of fear, not out of love and respect. Criticism and shame, instantly trigger our defense mechanisms, close our hearts and make learning very hard, if not impossible.

We are all wired for relationships and we all want to cooperate with people whom we trust and who will give us space to be us. When we feel connected, we want to contribute, we want to cooperate and we are very loyal. This is especially true of children. We do not need to use shame or fear to get children to obey. Fear always closes our heart and makes us less susceptible for learning.

4. Connect with the child/children

Acknowledge what you see. Take some deep breaths and make sure you come from a place where you genuinely can feel what they feel and experience what they experience. There is nothing more powerful than to be “seen”, “felt”, “heard” and taken seriously. This is when we connect. When we are connected we are open to learning. It is so simple, yet so very difficult in the moment.

Take a few breaths and try to feel the joy, the fun and the excitement with them. If you can acknowledge that in a genuine way, it is very likely that now they will be open to hearing your perspective of the situation and see the consequences of their fun. Learning from the situation is much more likely to happen.

It is a slower process than parenting by fear but it builds trust and a willingness to cooperate. TRUST is the platform from where the core Self opens up and our full potential can be realized. Without trust we close our hearts, we protect and we defend, very natural mechanisms. This creates disconnection both to Self and others. It is simple, but yet, so very, very difficult in the moment.

5. Share your perspective with the child

Share your perspective and your feelings without blaming or evaluating.

“When I saw you having so much fun in the kitchen, I was first very happy, because it makes me happy to see you happy. I could see how fun and exciting it was for you to throw the eggs. But then I felt sad for all the eggs that were wasted and for all the hens that made it possible for us to get food. I was also both sad and frustrated when I saw the mess. I was very tired and had been looking forward to spending the evening with you. With the mess that needed to be cleaned up, we did not have the time to do other things together. And I did not at all feel like cleaning after a long day at work. I got frustrated, sad and angry.”

6. Help your child see the consequences

Children do not see the consequences of their behavior in the moment but with help they can start learning that every choice has a consequence. They can learn about cause and effect instead of good and bad behavior.

“Look at you, with egg all over you and look at our kitchen cabinets, the floor, and the chairs. They are all full of egg. It will be a big cleaning job to clear this mess.”

7. Invite the child to find a solution and to be part of the solution

Children are very competent and are very willing to contribute. Once you have acknowledged their feelings, “seen” them or “heard” them, they usually have great

ideas about how things can be solved. They like to be invited, to help find a solution.

“What do you think we can do about it? How can we clean up this mess?”
You probably need to add solutions and together you can make a plan.

8. Help and support all the way to the end

Small children (and big for that matter) will give up very fast if they need to clean up or “repair” on their own. They need the support and guidance of an adult who can connect. If you cannot do that, which is very natural and nothing wrong, you can let somebody else do that. Make it fun, do it together and if the “mess” they have caused is too hard or too much to handle, give support and take over before it becomes a power struggle.

“This was a hard job, wasn’t it? You have worked so hard to clean up. Now, you run up and take a shower and I will fix the rest.”

9. Reflect together

At a time when you are connected, maybe later the same day or the next day, you can reflect on the situation together. Let the child tell you how he was thinking and what he was experiencing. No judging, no evaluation, JUST INTERESTED LISTENING. This is a mutual learning experience where you can get a glimpse of the inner world of your child.

Now you can teach, now you can tell the child if you do not want him or her to take eggs from the refrigerator and throw them in the kitchen, or whatever the situation may be.

Now he is likely to listen AND learn.

Parenting with intention is to create an environment where the child feels protected, to make it comfortable to participate and openly share ideas, experiences and thoughts. Parenting with intention is a way to give space for you to be you and the child to be him/her. Let curiosity and interest guide you. And remember that CONNECTION is the greatest and most important key to realizing potential, both yours and your child’s.

Author

Agnetha Stagling Birgersson writes: I am the mother of six children. My passion is human potential and I have dedicated my work to developing programs and models that help adults to build strong relationships and realize unique potential. I have worked with parents and children for over 35 years, in different countries.

In 1997 I started Familjeakademin (Family Academy) in Sweden. We train Group Leaders in our different programs for adults living with or working with children. Family Academy has trained over 750 Group Leaders that work mainly in Sweden but also in Europe and Asia.

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The Queen of the Desert – A Journey

By Yakarah Attias-Rosen

Introduction

The Queen of the Desert Project is a unique stand-alone venture in the arena of “organized trips abroad” because it encourages extreme sport for women. Its main value is the empowerment of women by women and the leveraging of this power to create activities for women and for the community.

The participants that are chosen (yes, hand-picked), self-drive jeeps in uncharted terrain, surrounded by breathtaking views and wild landscapes. During this journey, these women experience extreme sports activities, get to engage with and experience direct contact with the local culture and people and also have an opportunity to give back a little to society.

This journey is for every woman who believes in herself and knows that she can handle both the physical and mental challenges, encounters with the diverse and the different and with crossing both geographical and personal boundaries.

This being said, the personal differences among the women participating on this trip become very blurry during this special encounter, as they have no choice but to join forces with one another and are required to cooperate and work as a team. The women are required to show creativity, imagination, patience and tolerance, the ability to deal with rough conditions and a lot of willingness to be open to new experiences.

China – where women rule

Each year the Queen of the Desert chooses a new destination which is kept completely secret until the unveiling at an extravagant party to which all Queen veterans are invited.

All the trips that go out in that year head toward the same location, thus creating a group of 500-600 women who all share a similar, yet different experience. This alone creates an unspoken bond between all those who ventured out to that destination in that year.

The year I joined the Queen of the Desert the destination was China.

I knew that we would be traveling to the Yunnan Region¹ one of the most diverse and interesting areas of China, on the border with Tibet, Burma, Laos and Vietnam. Here you encounter snowy mountain tops alongside rice fields, picturesque villages and a breathtaking human and cultural landscape also made up of minority tribes. One of these is the Nakhi² (pronounced “Nashi”) tribe and we were going to be hosted by them during our journey. It is interesting to discover that the Nakhi tribe in the south of China is one of the last ethnic minorities still led and run solely by women.

The Nakhi and the Musuo³ are two of the 55 ethnic minority groups living in the Yunnan Region. They continue to lead their lives according to their own rules, which are based on the strength and the superiority of the woman in the family and allow her complete and total freedom from the social conventions we are used to. For instance, it has been customary for hundreds of years that you can love and be in a relationship without being formally married or even having to live together. The Nakhi realized a long time ago that a child can be certain of their mother’s identity, but not necessarily of their father’s, and that logic clearly states that it should be the child’s mother who should be responsible for their education, economic future and well-being. This is why the woman is the successor and the inheritor and the dominant figure in the family in these tribes.



¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yunnan_Province,_Republic_of_China

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nakhi_people

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosuo>

Different, yet similar

Just the thought of what might be similar or different between the group of women I was traveling with and the women of this tribe excited me. Getting the opportunity to see how female dominance in the Chinese Naxhi tribe is translated in day-to-day life was inspiring.

One cannot help but make a comparison between the women in this minority matriarchal tribe whom we met while traveling through the Yunnan Region, and the 40 powerful women who joined me on this journey to China, and who had chosen to disconnect themselves completely from all that is familiar and embrace the opportunity to find the courage to truly meet themselves from within – together with women from their home country and those from a very different one.



For many women who traveled to China that year, this encounter was a turning point from which they drew strength from others to take action, change and/or control, firstly and foremostly, their own lives.

Entering the unknown...

Nothing can really prepare you for a journey of this kind, especially since you are kept on a “need to know” basis from the beginning – and apparently, you don’t need to know anything!

The route of the trip is kept completely secret (and is known only to the team leading the trip together with a local guide), a proper introduction to the 40 women joining you for this experience is more or less only really done at the airport before you board the plane and the extreme activities that you are going to experience along the way are only revealed after you have put the safety harness on.



For many women, who spend their lives in control of their surroundings, planning their day, their schedule, their children's schedule, family obligations, meals, household chores and activities etc., this is not an easy feat or experience. You are forced to let go of being in control, of being the one who makes the decisions. You give into the vagueness, into the ambiguity, in fact, in the end it is almost blissful how you do not always have to have the answer or always be the one turned to for solutions.

When you return, you will understand

From the moment I left home, I started asking myself why? (or to be more exact: what in the world am I doing here?).

Clearly there were some women who came to see China (myself included), some who wanted to meet the physical challenge and those who came for the combination of the two.

The question "WHY" each one of us had come: why now; why this year; why this trip; turned out to be the most interesting question of all – for all of us.

Some knew exactly why they had embarked on this journey, what it was that they were searching for, what they wanted to leave behind. Some carried stories of overcoming illness, changing lifestyles and losing loved ones. And then there were others, who even after they had returned home, bags filled with lots of beautiful cheap little Chinese gifts, were still asking themselves this question, myself included.

I could not really put my finger on what it was that drew me to this experience, but I knew there was some reason, we all did – otherwise we would not have found ourselves in a little village on the other side of the world with another 40 women.

"When you return, you will understand" is the slogan that the Queen of the Desert has on its banner, and even though it reminds me of the slightly annoying slogan "When you grow up, you will understand," as if it is the sole knowledge of a secret group, there is definitely something to it.

Every day that passed after my return, I understood more and more...how this had been a powerful and empowering experience and that it would take me quite a while before I would be really able to process it.

The rituals – a window into your unique potential

“A ‘ritual’ is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to a set sequence”⁴ as acknowledgment or to effect change. We could also say that a ritual is any activity that we perform at least as much for its *symbolic and emotional value* as for its practical value.

The journeys created by the Queen of the Desert put a big emphasis on these rituals, because these acts in themselves have meaning, or because doing it makes us feel better about ourselves, or both. These rituals help form a community and this is an important factor when looking for meaning, purpose and direction in your life. A simple way to describe having “meaning” in your life is that it’s about being part of something that we really believe in, that is bigger than ourselves. Studies of people who believe their lives “have meaning” show big benefits for well-being and Martin Seligman – the founder of positive psychology – describes meaning as a vital component of happiness and well-being.⁵

I think that one of the reasons for this is that although most people need to be part of a community for life’s necessities, many want to be part of a community because there is something indescribably lovely about being a part of a group of people who share something more substantial than geographical location... something they feel passionately about. Something which, when shared, makes individuals seem less lonely and helps them find meaning in what they are doing and sharing.



⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual>

⁵ Seligman, M.E.P. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*. NY: Free Press.

In preparation for our trip we had been divided into groups of four, which had been pre-decided by the team leading our journey. These were the only women we would actually have the opportunity to get to know a little better before leaving the country.

Each group of four had been given an activity they had to plan and a gift they would have to give that would be disclosed to the other participants at some point along our journey and would be presented in some kind of ritual – and while we ourselves knew what our activity and gift would be, we did not know when this disclosure would take place – like I said before, ambiguity and “letting go” is the name of the game.

So already before leaving home, in groups of four, we started planning rituals that we would be responsible for. Something creative, fun and meaningful which for many of us helped us discover and express our own unique gifts.

In the departure hall at the airport, the sense of community is already sparked when you walk in and find another 30 or so women dressed in exactly the same clothes you are wearing.

The first ritual is the creation of a joint necklace. It is a fun act that tries to help us open the door to thinking about our aspirations. What is it that I would like to start searching for? What fear or concern I might have embarking on this journey? One bead for aspiration, one bead for a fear...this ritual is also the final one, as these beads are then given back to each of the women as a charm for them to keep with them, to remind them of their journey.

The 18-hour flight to Yunnan is also sprinkled with gifts from different groups, something small that shows thoughtfulness and caring, something creative like little pillows handcrafted by one of the women... 10 days of little gifts, creations and self-expression that allowed us all to feel appreciated, loved and for some to understand what direction they should possibly take in their lives, both professionally and personally.

Rituals are created constantly along the way, one for receiving the jeeps, one for quiet times in the morning, one for when we got to the top of a mountain and entered a Tibetan monastery, one for after we had all rappelled down the dam right beside a waterfall, one for thanking the Nakhi women and the list goes on and on.



Moreover, each of these rituals was carried out during all of the journeys to China by the groups of women who journeyed there before and after us. Some might have taken a slightly different form, or have contained some different gifts and ideas, but there was a clear feeling that just knowing that we were carrying out an action that had been performed by others around us, either before or after us, connected us with this community of individuals.

The community – a way to continue...

At the end of the journey you come home with the taste for “more”, which is translated into what is called the “Queens’ Club.” This is a unique community that was born from the women themselves after they came back from their experiences. They wanted to harness the energy and fire that was sparked during their trips into something bigger and better.

This completely voluntary community does a lot of social activity in cooperation with many foundations and organizations and acts as a social and business network which also organizes social events throughout the year for the women to meet.

The “Queens” that come back from their journeys are automatically part of this community. Each activity is unique and special and each woman in her own way can take part, be active and influence the work and activities that take place all through the year.

Over the years, experience has shown that after these women return from their journey, many of them take a different route in life and become freelancers or develop their own businesses. Business cooperation and joint endeavors develop between the women and the networking, which at the beginning is spontaneous, flourishes.

After giving birth, many women take time out from the business world for maternity leave and often after doing this, many contacts and networks in the business world disappear. By creating this community these women become a support group for one another and help

each other back into this world thus also creating a huge platform of contacts, connections and clients.

As for me....

It has now been 5 years since my first journey to China and five years that I have been part of this amazing community. I experienced myself in many different situations, spending hours on end in a jeep with the same women when sometimes all you want is your own quiet space, difficult physical situations such as extreme cold and tiredness while having to support your companions and work as a team. Overcoming fear when experiencing extreme activities and difficult driving.

Showering only with a bucket of cold water and being able to accept the fact that often there will be no “real toilets” or showers for days. All of these have taught me important lessons about who I am, my level of resilience and ability to see things through and have moved me to try and give back a little of what I gained.



The teams that lead the journeys are made up of three women that meet up with a local team in the country they are traveling in – the “Professional guide” who knows the country we are visiting and the route of the trip, the “Logistic guide” who takes care of all the physical needs of the women on the trip from making sure they have clothes to wear to making sure they have food to eat and the “Social guide” who is there to prepare the women before they leave, guide them in developing their activities, giving them support before, during and after the trip. These social guides are basically taking the role of containing and holding the group together – as many bring with them stories of loss, pain, searching and enquiring which is what brings them to this unique place of understanding what direction their life should take.

When I returned, I became part of the group of women who became “Social Guides.” I took a group of 40 women to India in the hope of giving them the gift of starting a journey that might help them understand themselves better, their needs, hopes and desires. I also

joined the training network of this community, teaching the “social instructors” how best to support these women that they would be taking on this journey and how to help them express themselves and their uniqueness.

The Queen of the Desert also has quite a few volunteer projects open to all of the women who have experienced the journeys and are part of the community. Fundraiser days for women trying to escape the cycle of domestic violence, rehabilitation work with women convicts who have served their time, redecorating and fixing homes and hostels for youth at risk are just some examples of how these women can give back to society together as a community, thus enjoying time with their fellow “Queens” and finding worth in their actions.

To all those women along the years who have heard that I went on the “Queen of the Desert” and tell me that this is their dream, I say, fulfill this dream – you owe it to you yourself and nothing I can describe comes close to the truth – only when you return, will you understand!

Author

Yakarah Attias-Rosen is Head of Operations for the Learning for Well-Being Foundation. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa to British parents, Yakarah lived in Cape Town and then moved to Dublin, Ireland where her father held the position of Chief Rabbi of Ireland. In 1985, at the age of 11, she moved with her family to Israel. Today she lives in Lappid, Israel with her husband and three children.

Yakarah holds a Bachelor’s degree from the Hebrew University and a Master’s in Business Management from the Polytechnic University in New York. Over the past five years she has been developing and leading empowerment retreats for Israeli Women in cooperation with the “Queen of the Desert” organization in Israel. She loves meeting new people, traveling the world, good food, running and has found a new interest in Yoga.

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Answering the Call: The Role of Transformational Art Processes

By Aviva Gold

Introduction

The reality of ecological devastation and suffering of people, even when not directly in our face, lies always on the edge of our psyche. All else seems secondary while our air, water, food, night sky, silence and earth, become polluted. Images of war and the devastation of all living creatures bombard us. Cell phones, texts, tweets, sound bytes, emails invade, distract and drain us. Often I feel helpless and in despair. I want to contribute. I want to make a difference.

This I know: Art in all its varieties is the most potent transformational magic available to humankind. Art is a revelatory spiritual and healing practice; it is our universal heart-opening language. Art offers expression, detoxification and clearing of shadows, clearing of personal and collective unconscious blocks. The Transformational Art Process which I teach, "Painting From The Source[®]," is an intuitive unplanned painting expression, which deepens with the addition of multiple modalities such as sound, movement and poetic dialog. Such spiritual creative experiences can initiate "breakthrough," ease personal and collective angst, and open the heart to the needs of our planet and fellow beings. Creating alone or in a group can also be fun, playful and joyous, offering opportunities to lighten up. It provides an opportunity to see life in a larger perspective!

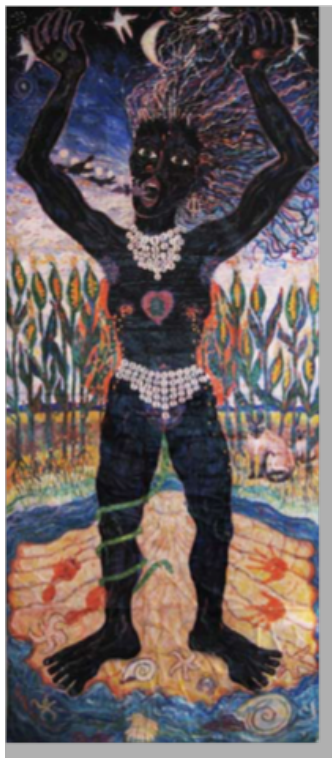
I also know that each of us is called to participate in our own unique way. If you are uncertain of your purpose or not yet found what gives you meaning, then I invite you to paint. And, please note: any reference to positive attributes of the process of painting, applies to all creative modalities, such as dance, music, song, poetry, theater, and new combinations. When you engage in transformational art processes what excites you, what makes you feel more alive will become obvious. As Carl Jung says, "Trust what gives you meaning and let it be your guide."

My personal search

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s my own personal search for meaning and healing brought me face-to-face with the “Wild Woman Archetype,” an energy and being who has disrupted, guided and reassured me in my life journey. Powerful female figures – birthing creatures of all sorts – had shown up in my paintings for years. Then in the mid-1990s a friend gave me the audio tapes of “Women Who Run With The Wolves” by Clarissa Estes. I became obsessed with listening to these tapes filled with myths and fairy tales dealing with the Wild Woman Archetype. I cried and laughed. Hearing the stories of the Wild Woman Archetype was an awakening for me. The stories helped me understand, accept and value aspects of my life and paintings of which I had previously felt ashamed. Realizing that the Wild Woman was a strong active aspect of myself was reassuring and healing.

A few years later I was teaching a workshop in New Mexico. I painted a dark female face on a single sheet of paper. The one-page face demanded a body and it took a year of adding on papers, painting, allowing her voice, dance, sounds to come through me and listening to her guidance to finally complete this 10-foot tall painting. She is indeed the essence of Wild Woman, our dark powerful shadow calling out for earth healing through authentic creativity. She has various names: Dark Eros, Black Venus, Lilith, The Great Cosmic Mother.

Black Wild Woman hangs on my wall wherever I live cheering me on, guiding me, reminding me of the purpose in all I do. People who see her are either deeply moved or agitated. No one remains neutral.



Black Venus by Aviva Gold

We are living in a time when more people feel desperate ... cut off from their authentic self and purpose; thus a window of opportunity opens. I believe and here propose, that the process of creating intuitive art is a potent, necessary and radical form of activism and spiritual practice. Opening our hearts and ultimately the heart of our culture to authentic creativity is our best hope for positive change in the way we live on earth.

Going deeper: Art medicine

"The Soul does not think without a picture" – Aristotle

A more urgent, pressing, direct and essential use of art on a grander, more earthy, popular scale, is what we need. What I call creating Source Art is an intentional ritual for individual, group, and planetary healing. Ritual is a set of actions, which marks the sacredness of life and is performed mainly for its symbolic mystical value. James Hillman, Jungian Analyst and author of *Re-Visioning Psychology*, reminds us that "the soul is exposed and available during a crisis. The ego drops away and we come in touch with the essentials of life and death." Thus an opportunity arises to take a risk, to try something new. In practicing our art, we practice life, we bring heart to mind, we discover the universal Sacred in everything, (including our perceived enemies). I believe the practice of alchemical Soul Art is a natural way to stay connected to our higher self.

Sadly, many of us turn off the switch. I hear the lament from thousands who come to my workshops: "I stopped painting when my third grade teacher said, 'Don't you know that daisies aren't blue?';" "My father would not pay for college if I studied art;" "I lost touch with my inspiration and my paintings became stagnant when the gallery and public wanted to buy the same look;" "I got so busy with life/survival, there was no time to paint (write, sing, make music)." Does this sound familiar?

I taught art to children – all ages and socio-economic groups – in New York City and other locations for many years. I noticed that most children in our culture somewhere between the age of 7 to 11 stop creating from the Source, even if they show special interest and/or promise, due to some imposed standard they are often discouraged.

The goal is to empower each person with whatever level of creative expression is right for them. There is no need for intermediaries, experts, or enhancing psychedelic substances. Each person has their own direct experience of the divine Source through creative sensuous and ecstatic body engagement. This is the process we encounter through the Painting From The Source process.

Power of the tribe: Connect with others to find yourself

"umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" ("a person is a person through (other) persons").
– Zulu maxim related to South Africa Philosophy of Ubuntu.

A workshop participant speaks: *"My own painting only grows and gets fed by painting with others. I know that painting is meant to be a social activity, a sharing, and a way to know*

each other without the encumbrance of words. I wrote in my journal, 'Have just done the intensive Painting From The Source. I saw art in a completely different way. It moved me from a place other than beauty. Everyone revealed himself or herself on the paper; they couldn't help it. And my whole process was so much more honest than I normally am with myself and I felt like I came that much closer to really expressing myself.'

Imagine you are in a large room with empty white papers on the walls around you and a table filled with a spectrum of colored paints along with a variety of different sized paintbrushes. As you sit among your "tribe mates" in a circle you are aware that this is the 21st century. Like you, these people bear modern titles and personas – lawyer, teacher, salesperson, parent, homemaker, professional painter, therapist or corporate executive. Like you they are weighed down with everyday concerns. Still, even before you hear their introduction and see their embryonic paintings, you sense deeper tales beneath them.



Coming together to paint and share, the experience transforms this group of 21st century citizens into a primordial gathering of noble souls. Imagine this group as your ancient ancestral tribe which has taken time out from daily hunting, gathering and other survival tasks. Perhaps the occasion is a solstice, full moon, harvest or hunt. You are gathering once more to infuse everyday life with the absolute need to connect with a deeper purpose and to the eternal Self that existed before you were born and that will exist after your death. The magic and alchemy of creativity will be both your vehicle and memorial.

You can see how simply coming together in a circle with the intention to create can activate your primal tribal memory. A safe spiritual container is further established with an inspiring prayer/ invocation. After lighting a candle on our altar, I ask participants to take a few deep breaths, settle down and bring their attention inward to their bodily sensations.

I then say some variation of the following ecumenical invocation:

“Great Spirit, You that energy which started the universe in motion, be with us in this painting retreat; Great Spirit, You that evolutionary creative energy which oversaw the formation of our star, sun and solar system eons ago, be with us, protect and guide us this weekend (day, week); You, Creative Source of all, who oversaw the cooling of our molten planet flung from our star sun, oversaw the separation of our future moon from our molten crust; Yes, you that energy, present as the speck of DNA in a tidal pool, evolved into swimming things, crawling scaly creatures, winged creatures, furry beings and two-legged ones like us, please be with us, protect and guide us as we open our vulnerable selves to your creative powers. Please flow through us as we put brush to paper; give us what we most need even though it may look very different from what we thought we needed.”



I hope you can feel how this invocation, which places us in the bigger picture of deep time and space, further grounds the intention for an auspicious and revelatory inner journey. New tribe mates open their eyes feeling an energy shift in themselves and the room, they are more present, rooted, expectant, heart open toward each other. I ask people to look around the circle and make eye contact with the souls with whom they will be journeying.

The candle flickers within the circle revealing eager faces. It is time for brief introductions. I ask, “tell us your true name (people sometimes choose a special painting name); with no premeditation, tell us briefly your greatest hope for this painting retreat, and, if you are aware of any fear, what is your greatest fear?” Often there are tears as people speak. Often people’s greatest hope and fear are the same. For instance, “My greatest hope is to be fully present, to be free. And my greatest fear is to be fully present and to be free.”

Now to paint, to pray. The Studio, the painting chapel, feels pregnant with impending mystery.

Another participant speaks to the power of the tribe:

"I gave in to the paint, to the brushes, and to my inner voice. I watched others paint with the reverence you had instilled in us. I could almost hear the buzz of excitement as people pushed through their fear and experimented with the unknown. There were no judgments or criticisms, just loving support. Once, I heard laughter behind me and was sure they were laughing at me. But my trust in the group was stronger than the voice of paranoia. I let go of the thought and continued painting. A place in me that I thought was dried up and dead appears to be alive and well. I am proud and grateful to be part of the painting tribe."

It becomes clear that Source Painting in a group provides all the elements to fully rekindle and reflect our true altruistic nature, embodying the African philosophy of Ubuntu. The process emphasizes that now is a time when you must connect with others to find yourself.

Transformation, transmutation, alchemy, individuation, & beyond

"Creation is the place the Sacred waits to be discovered."
– Rabbi Arthur Green, Sacred Evolution

We are talking about change for the better, talking about going through a process that somehow alters us for the better. In the end we are talking about spiritual Source creativity as a catalyst for changing us, and thus the world, for the better. The concepts and reality of transformation, transmutation, alchemy, and individuation are germinal to our quest.

We understand transformation as a marked change in appearance, behavior and character, as in biology, the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, and/or of child to adult. For our purposes it implies an evolved change/growth in form or attitude while keeping the same basic genetics.

Transmutation is a metaphysical concept, implying a basic radical change from one form, condition, substance to another, like the alchemical concept of changing lead into gold. This is a more miraculous, magical aspect of transformation. The Freudians alternate the word, "transmutation," with "sublimation," the process of re-channeling sexual energy or passion into art making. In both transmutation and transformation there is a change from a more raw, common, less evolved substance or state of being into a more inspiring, precious, highly evolved substance or state.

Alchemy is both a philosophy and an ancient practice, which contributed to the basics of modern chemistry and has been practiced throughout Asia, the Middle East and then in Europe in a complex network of schools and philosophical systems spanning at least 2,500 years into the 20th century. Alchemy focused on the attempt to change base metals like lead into gold, investigating the preparation of the "elixir of longevity" and achieving

ultimate wisdom. A legendary substance called the “Philosopher’s Stone” was sought as a catalyst to activate these alchemical transmutations.

Finding the “Philosopher’s Stone” has never been recorded. Nor is there any record of changing lead into gold or finding the elixir of eternal youth. However, I see the alchemical process and activation of the Philosopher’s Stone as metaphorically necessary and alive in the creative process; I propose that after thousands of years of losing the body, the feminine principle and over-activating the mind and intellect, the “stone,” the key/catalyst which unlocks the transmutation magic, is right above our nose, the pineal gland also known as the “third eye.” As described in Eastern Yogic teachings the third eye becomes re-activated and opens during an authentic body-centered creative process. So true art is alchemy, transmutation, raw materials of paper and paint into magic living painted beings (which alter the viewer as well as the painter) and is only possible with the activated mind/body which I also call the Awakened Artist’s Soul. This finding the Stone within ourselves, touching the balance of feminine/ masculine energy, is both the journey and destination of life.

Carl Jung and analytic psychology call this quest of discovering the unique individual you truly are, the process of “Individuation.” I understand the process of awakening the artist’s soul and the individuation process to be the same; in both you activate the “Stone” within. The Jungians further explain individuation as the process of actualizing your individual blueprint through examining and listening to imagery patterns and archetypes in your dreams and waking imagination. You then begin to see your individual deep values and nature separate from those of your family and culture.

The process of submerging in Source Art fosters individuation as well. Both Source Art and Jungian analysis unfold and activate the “Stone,” in each of us. I believe, as did Jung, that a human being is inwardly whole, but most of us have lost touch with important parts of ourselves. Finding our own Philosopher’s Stone is finding our true self. In the creative process it is both activated and actualized.

In the early 20th century, Jung, who was going through his own mid-life crisis, fell into and experimented with a waking dream exploratory process, using imagination, painting, dialoging and journaling. This was a profoundly powerful catalyst for his own individuation process which he called “Active Imagination.” Painting From The Source taps into the same universal dream energy of Active Imagination...taps into the collective unconscious but with the important addition of movement, sound, ritual and performance art in a tribal communal setting. Source Art emphasizes the feminine principle, the full engagement with body, which is now essential for our progress to sanity. Non-verbal, evocative movement and sound, passionate emotion, sensuality in tribal circles has not been previously valued and embraced by our culture. These feminine attributes (in both men and woman) must now take center stage to support a global individuation process of human consciousness.



These subtle energies flow from the activities of life, consciousness and spirit. They create an energy ecology, a second ecology of the earth, that surrounds and permeates the world and is deeply interconnected with the biological ecology around us.

–David Spangler Writer and Spiritual Teacher

Tribal source circle in action

Now we move to the cauldron in which the magic gets stirred. Over the past 35 years I have offered a safe, sacred container to facilitate thousands of people in group gatherings worldwide through this transformational healing painting journey. Always, at some point, I look around the room while people are engaged in amazing courageous paintings, all so different yet the same in authenticity. I sense a primal stirring, a sense of shared trust...goose bumps, breath of fresh air, sanity.

Periodically we sit in a circle surrounded by our birthing paintings. Each painter, when called by an inner prompting, courageously allows the movements and sounds in his/her painting to come through him/her as we all witness. I call this “embodiment,” as we allow the painting to borrow our voice and our entire body, what Shamans have traditionally called “shape shifting.” This may move into spontaneous movements, dance, sounds or song ... often surprising the painter and witnesses alike. Sometimes wild movements, growls, screams and shaking erupt, alarming us. Sometimes there is silence, song, humor or vulnerability, often tears.



Sometimes an image, a blue bird, a gnarled brown troll or a mighty oak, will poetically speak to us through the painter's altered voice... rumbling like a tree or squeaky like a bird or anguished like a desolate troll... startling, delighting, deeply moving us to tears or laughter, awe. Sometimes the group spontaneously gathers around an anguished person with hands held toward that person chanting and sending healing energy.

Do people's health, behavior and attitudes change for the better after the group art making experience? ... Yes! always and constantly. People go home altered for good. They make positive changes in their lives, health and habits. They start becoming active in ecology and social reform, making necessary contributions in their communities. Often the people in the group stay in contact long after our retreat. And always the paintings when fully completed are extraordinary. Many people invite friends to paint when the workshop is over.



Painting and expressing your archetypal shadows and guides in a group setting fosters your individuation process, opens your artist's soul. You discover that what is already yours are riches enough! Art is indeed the royal road to transformation.

Author

Aviva Gold, MFA, has been facilitating inspired art for over 36 years. She leads Painting From The Source workshops and Teacher Trainings in the US and Internationally. Her background includes Psychoanalytic, Jungian and Gestalt psychotherapy; she is also an artist, author and spiritual seeker. Aviva believes the process by which art is made is similar to the evolutionary process of creation in the universe and the capacity to create is part of the divinity of being human. She has published two books: *Painting From The Source*, Harper Collins, 1998 and *Source Art in the World*, 2011, www.paintingfromthesource.com.

She is the mother of three sons and resides in Oracle, Arizona.