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Embodied Education: Reflections on Sustainable Education

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Abstract: This paper explores the thinking that led to the author's earlier article, written as an entry, for UNESCO's Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS) entitled "Sustainable Education: Imperatives for a Viable Future". The present paper links this thinking to the author's endeavours as a teacher in a wide range of settings: university, secondary, primary and instrumental music. It is an attempt to answer holistic educational philosopher Ron Miller's question: 'How can we teach what we do not live?' (Miller 2000: 53). The paper links the author's own life journey as a teacher of over 20 years to the literature that has informed and shaped his earlier reflections for the UNESCO article. This is in many ways a personal exploration or meditation on what it means to try and teach from a neohumanist paradigm committed to holistic sustainability. This phenomenological positioning follows what Kesson, Traugh and Perez III call 'descriptive inquiry' (2006: 1862). The presentation can be seen as an example of embodied futures thinking that is explored through a narrative presentation drawing on the author's own experience and practice. The environments that shaped this line of thought, while not explicitly present within the body of the paper, include P. R. Sarkar's neohumanist schools, Montessori schools, the Suzuki music studio, John Holt's democratic schools, the current development of an online PROUT College (www.proucollege.org) and finally my experiences teaching undergraduates at university. The central thesis of this paper is that teachers need to embody, albeit imperfectly, the stance they take in the educational arena in their own lives. Thus, in the context of this article, it is argued that there is a direct link between sustainable education and those teaching it, living lives aligned with this pedagogical focus. In this the author takes to heart the well known phrase from Mahatma Gandhi: Be the change you want to see in the world!

Keywords: Sustainable Education, Neohumanism, Descriptive Inquiry, Futures Thinking

Introduction

"How can we as educators help make our students whole if we are not committed to becoming whole ourselves?" Aostre N. Johnson (1999: 108)

I WANT TO reflect here not on what happens when I teach well (best to avoid such hubris) but on what happens when, to paraphrase Woody Allen's comment about life, my teaching is simply about showing up. All teachers are familiar with these daily tracts of time when we are hanging out with people, sharing, connecting, missing the boat and generally mucking around. For me this is liminal time, where the mundane drudgery of daily activity merges into the background of fertile shadowy possibilities. It is on these occasions when I am at my most vulnerable and human and when the deeper processes of the social and cosmic intersect and shape consciousness.

My reflections will be set against the backdrop of an entry I wrote for UNESCO's Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS) on sustainable education (Bussey 2002). In this entry I mapped out a series of imperatives for sustainable education and offered an holistic taxonomy of what such education might entail. Here I want to offer a subjective account of how I arrived at the writing of this article

for EOLSS. I am doing this with Johnson's question, cited above, as my compass. Her analysis of education and its need for sacrament points a finger directly at the teacher and the systems of intelligibility that create her/him. Thus she draws a direct link between our life practice and the practice of teaching:

The teacher who would nurture the centering of students must be deeply engaged in his or her own centering, simultaneously exploring both 'inner' and 'outer' worlds (ibid: 108).

Though the following is largely subjective I have always found it useful to anchor my musings in the literature, so I will cite where ever it seems useful and thus offer the reader some insight into my intellectual 'DNA'. Finally, I am, of course, aware of the problematic nature of the term 'sustainable' (Hench & Betton, 2007) and seek to ground it phenomenologically in lived experience via a form of descriptive inquiry that displays "an active attunement to the many layers of meaning in unfolding events" (Kesson, Traugh and Perez III 2006: 1864). In doing so I am not advocating for sustainability curricula interventions, nor for greener or more 'natural' schools. What I am recognising and endeavouring to engage is the loose, multiple and thoroughly intimate face of an embodied approach to sustainable education (Le Grange 2004; Bonnett 2006). But, to



begin at the beginning, let me summarize the central feature of my original article on sustainable education (Bussey 2002).

Layered Sustainability

In EOLSS I argued for a layered approach to thinking about sustainability. In this way I sought to avoid essentialising the term, locking it into a recipe or an absolute state. Instead I argued that it was something to be embodied, as a state of being, as an orientation to life. In this I was working with the understanding that ‘reality’ is neither a given nor purely subjective. Following Michael Bonnett (2006) I feel that “reality itself is human-related, that things only ‘show up’ ... in the space which is consciousness” (ibid: 273). Philosophically, this can be read as a form of constructivism in the Deleuzian sense of the term, in which sense-making is a process oriented, open ended activity, that rhizomically weaves meaning and reality out of experience (Deleuze & Guattari 1988; Gough 2006; Semetsky; 2006). This situates me and my teaching in a phenomenological ‘space’ in which I *am* my consciousness, I *enact* my consciousness, and that therefore I *teach* my consciousness. And this being-doing-teaching all occurs within a relationship with those things which constitute reality (Deleuze 1993).

Bonnett sums up this relational space that is consciousness beautifully:

Consciousness, alone, is not the author of things, it, itself, is only in its relationship with things. Consciousness is nothing without its things: things constitute consciousness as much as consciousness constitutes things. Consciousness is the space where things stand forth and the precise quality of conscious space at any moment is conditioned by these things in their standing forth (with all their cultural significances). (ibid: 274)

The sense of this reciprocity is integral to my thinking about teaching. It provides the foundation for a poetic engagement with curriculum and sustainability that is profoundly human. In being human it acknowledges the place that paradox, tension and contradiction have in the classroom, and in educational thought in general (See Palmer, 1998: 73ff). These are the aporias of modernity and the post-material turn.

To manage the tensions involved in an embodied approach to education requires me to manage the layered nature of consciousness as mapped below. Such a negation requires integrity while acknowledging that the layered approach to thinking and enacting sustainability is about living our lives aware of the whole while recognising the tradeoffs that our

own choices bring. Thus when I calculate my environmental footprint I always do badly on petroleum fuels despite having a small three-cylinder car. This is because I live 45km from my work. I have chosen to live in a rural setting – to me this is an emotional need; hence the trade off, as I lose balance when distanced from ‘nature’.

So when I think about my teaching as an expression of a sustainable orientation to life, I take into account the layered nature of the process (Bussey 2002). This involves five basic categories:

- Physical Sustainability
- Intellectual Sustainability
- Emotional Sustainability
- Ethical Sustainability
- Spiritual Sustainability

I frame my personal engagement with sustainability in considerations that involve all five layers; thus I am what I eat; I am what I think; I am how I feel; I am how I act; and I am spirit. The verbal nature of being, captured in the term itself is what counts – hence what I say counts for little, it is always what I do that comes first. In the teaching context this is absolutely true. Students learn little from words and a lot from presence. Words transmit information, while presence teaches about integrity and, perhaps occasionally, wisdom. The microvita we transmit, the lived energy of relationship, insight, understanding and inspiration is rooted in this deeper reality of embodying or ‘presencing’ the possibility. Thus the endeavour to bring sustainability into our own lives is embodied through a conscious engagement with the aspiration. This embodiment makes us vulnerable to the judgements of others. You know, the “Look at him, he talks about sustainability all the time but he drives over 80kms a day – can’t call that sustainable can you?” kind of remark.

The interesting thing I find is that it is in being vulnerable that teachers become real to students. Judith Butler (2004, p.19ff) argues that vulnerability is a core aspect of our humanity; that it breaks down the barriers of difference and allows for a space to emerge in which we can, in shared vulnerability, identify with the other. I can relate to this as it allows me to recognise the embodied quality that comes with making the effort to live sustainably. I, as a unit being, must recognise the limits to my Being. I must inhabit this limitation, make it my own, bear the burden of Self and practise the sustainable as it is the key to a profound social and ecological shift. This is the first step and leads me to the following assertion.

Sustainable Education is Not a Didactic Process

It is my basic proposition that sustainable education is not a didactic process but an embodied and relational engagement with life. As such, it happens everywhere, not just in the school and university. For me teaching is a direct expression of the teacher's lifeworld. As I teach I mine my cultural, emotional and spiritual resources and my body and heart are the terms of reference that define what is possible and how the learning happens and is processed.

This is not a one-way process; teaching is not about unilateralism. That in itself is an unsustainable position. The learning culture we create as teachers is heavily dependent on the input of all stakeholders. Teaching is thus a political activity as it mirrors the macrohistorical processes that are testing the world today. Furthermore, building on Ian Lowe's assertion that sustainable science can only be meaningful within an awareness of complex nonlinear systems (2006), I see that teaching, as pedagogical science, must be similarly attuned to such complexity. Lowe's statement here is as pertinent to education as it is to his own field:

The problems are complicated by our inability to stand outside the nature-society system, meaning we cannot even in principle be objective observers of the system (or our own teaching). We have to accept that our engagement with complex natural (pedagogical) systems can't be based on the model of objective science (or pedagogy). The traditional sequential steps must become parallel functions of social learning, additionally incorporating the elements of action, adaptive management and policy as experiment. (Lowe 2006, my comments in parentheses)

So when thinking about sustainable teaching I am forced to allow for the other, not just as 'student' but as 'fellow traveller'. The life world is not hermetically sealed and as a result, we are liberated from constraint. Learning becomes reciprocal and the collective consciousness of the group is enriched.

The intersection of complex systems thinking with layered sustainability allows me to think about broad processes as personal issues (see Bussey 2006a, pp90-91). The layered self offers an ecology of consciousness and pedagogy that embraces the entirety of the process of education. It leads to the following observations. Firstly, education is not simply about knowledge transfer. Knowledge is no longer simply an abstraction, it is a process that integrates physical expression with understanding and meaning, creating a network of fluid and self-sustaining systems of shared power that involve the knower in a

community, what Karin Knorr Cetina (1999) calls an 'epistemic culture'. Secondly, knowledge in such a world is contested. Though there is a hegemonic centre that attempts to stamp out dissent, divergence is now a necessary component of knowledge creation and vitality. This leads to what Bruno Latour (1991) identifies as 'hybridity', a quality which can be seen as a defining feature of postmodern knowledge creation and validation. Thirdly, this second point leads to the understanding that we are now sites of this contestation. This struggle is experienced as stress, confusion, doubt, repression and fundamentalism. Finally, this contestation is expressed at the systems level as a reaction against multiplicity and in an increased effort to control and define all aspects of education under the sway of the state (Bussey 2006b).

Once personalised, sustainable education becomes more rigorous but less orderly. It might challenge curricula prescriptions but it offers depth and meaning. This leads to the following thought.

The Most Natural Thing

Teaching is the most natural thing in the world. It is something human beings do as part of being human. When done naturally it is simply a generous moment when experience is shared either verbally or through demonstration. Teaching only became unnatural when it was institutionalised and consequently professionalised (see Miller 2006). With the invention of the classroom something fundamentally human was lost. Heidegger would say that we had imposed a technical rationality on a human process (Heidegger 1992). Foucault would have it that teachers became jailors of the mind (Foucault 1995) while Sarkar would claim that love was missing from the classroom (Sarkar 1998). Postman, on the other hand, would say teaching had lost its deeper meaning (Postman 1996) and O'Sullivan confirms this, pointing to the impoverished worldview that underpins materialist educational culture (O'Sullivan 1999). However we construct it, teaching has been diminished and its spontaneity, its creativity and its joy drained away.

Such a depiction of course, can be said to be romantic and ahistorical. Yes, teaching in pre-modern contexts could often be violent and dehumanising - associated with the whip and authoritarianism (Milojević 2005). Also, the claim to be natural can be said to be essentialising a complex human process - after all what is natural? As Jim Dator asserts, nature is dead and dying everywhere (Dator 2005). As a category it has perhaps only aspirational effect; though it does purport to delimit that part of existence untouched by human hand this is unhelpful, as even observing existence imposes the categorical upon it.

For me the 'naturalness' of teaching in non-institutionalised settings arises simply from its uncomplicated and relatively uninhibited expression.

To transfer such 'naturalness' to an institutionalised classroom is not beyond the reach of teachers. Such an endeavour turns the practice of teaching from a craft to an art, or, as Johnson (1999) reminds us, into a sacrament. One thing we can do when seeking to reclaim teaching and embody it within the artificial environment of the classroom is to reinstitute joy – give people permission to play, experiment, get things wrong and laugh and ponder on this. To start the ball rolling I take risks: I might tell stories, sing songs, question, imagine, role-play or whatever is appropriate. In doing this I have found I need to situate my stance consciously within a narrative that resists the dominant paradigm. Here of course paradoxes abound. To be within an institution yet to situate oneself either beyond it or in opposition to it is the first challenge. Yet, as Parker Palmer (1998) reminds us, paradoxes are our friends. His teaching method deliberately builds paradox into each classroom session. Thus he observes:

The principle of paradox is not a guide only to the complexities and potentials of selfhood. It can also guide us in thinking about classroom dynamics and in designing the kind of teaching and learning space that can hold the classroom session... Teaching and learning require a higher degree of awareness than we ordinarily possess – and awareness is always heightened when we are caught in a creative tension. Paradox is another name for that tension, a way of holding opposites together that creates an electric charge that keeps us awake (ibid: 73-74).

The paradox of joy is complex. Not only do I invite it into a setting which in many ways distrusts joy, I also must balance it with the need for creative discipline, and harness it in productive ways that channel it towards synthesis. This is my 'creative' tension as well as the tension that underpins any learning event. Furthermore, each event is unique. Palmer's teaching from paradox enables him to integrate the complexity of being with the reasonable expectations of any learning context: that we learn. Sustainable education thus plays the hyphen between self and structure (Hattam 2004: 26). My identity as a teacher dwells with the hyphen; how I see myself and how others perceive me is all linked to this interplay.

The Resisters

I have taught many children and adults who desperately want to have agency taken from them; they will resist freedom, choice, wonder and awe. Kelly (2008) describes such individuals as 'resisters'. They consti-

tute about 9% of most groups and can be both powerful and destructive.

I have found that the older the students the more challenging sustainable and holistic approaches to learning can be for both of us. Some adolescents can be cynical and negative, harbouring a deep feeling of betrayal (Bussey 2003). For them learning is competitive and disconnected from their reality. Parker Palmer captures this clearly when he observes:

There is a simple reason why some students resist thinking: they live in a world where relationships are often quite fragile. They are desperate for more community, not less, so when thinking is presented to them as a way of disconnecting themselves from each other and from the world, they want nothing of it. (Palmer 1993, xvi)

Undergraduates, on the other hand, tend to be utilitarian and pragmatic about their studies and thus seek information rather than deeper transformative narratives. This is understandable when we consider how universities and other post secondary education providers have been challenged and transformed by the 'knowledge economy' and the increasingly utilitarian conflation of education and training (Snyder 2006). One example of this is how undergraduate students in Great Britain are drawing up charters in which they demand 'value for money' from their universities (Asthana 2006). Asthana reports that:

Baroness Ruth Deech, the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, who deals with student complaints, said students had adopted an increasingly confrontational approach since fees were introduced. Going to university, she added, was not like buying a package holiday. "It is more like joining a gym," she said. "You pay money and they provide the facilities and trainers. Obviously they have to meet the quality promised, but after that it's up to you."

This is a powerful metaphor – if education is to be likened to the gym and teachers to trainers then Freire's image of the banking system of learning (still) reigns supreme (Freire 1972). Yet deeper resisting comes from my own divided consciousness. Those deeply conditioned responses that sustainable practice must work so hard to debug. I must acknowledge the following point.

Fractured Self: Multiple Selves

As an aspiring neohumanist teacher (Bussey 2007) I feel myself to be caught between two worlds. This is a hard place to be. It means that there is a biological as well as an intellectual rebellion and struggle

forever churning within me. I am a contested site because I inhabit two worlds: The modernist one that is powerful and repressive, that chides and worries, rewards and punishes, elevates and casts down; and the neohumanist one which is postmaterial, holistic and integrated, healing, strengthening and loving, this world embraces the other and is patterned and multifaceted, it shifts and moves like water around the modernist monolith¹.

I feel myself to be stuck in between, which of course is a real space, a space of becoming. This can be painful and scary. I teach from this decidedly ambiguous space. Yet I bring to my teaching the lessons I gain from both the personal struggle and also from all those who share this struggle with me, and thankfully there are many. My bookshelves are heavy with their words and my relationships rich with their presence. This sense of community sustains me by affirming my own experiences. Yet, I have no doubt that the self, my *self*, is fractured. It has been shattered by the driving attack of western empiricism and material progress on mystery. At the root of this attack is the urge to reduce everything to its smallest part in order to gain control, dispel disorder and replace it with certitude. Yet my soul yearns for mystery, not simply as a panacea (the opiate that Marx critiqued) for modern ills but because I have an intuitive understanding that in this mystery lies some unquantifiable ingredient that is essential to my own humanity.

Starhawk (1989) makes this point beautifully: the mysteries are what is wild in us, what cannot be quantified or contained. But the mysteries are also what is most common to us all: blood, breath, heartbeat, the sprouting of seed, the waxing and waning of the moon, the turning of the earth around the sun, birth, growth, death and renewal. Sustainable, holistic, neohumanistic teaching is alive to these mysteries. Why? Because it is mystery that leaps over the narrow boundaries between disciplines and mocks the divisions that the knowledge brokers, disguised as educators and experts, have sort to establish in order to domesticate the wild in our hearts.

Sustainable educators do so many things: they care (Noddings 2003), they transgress (hooks 1994), they inspire (Sheldrake & Fox 1996), they love (Palmer 1993; McWilliam 1999), they enlighten (Sarkar 1998), they question (Inayatullah 2002), they challenge (Eisler 2000), they reconfigure (Milojević 2005), they reinscribe (Foucault 1995), they weave grammars of possibility (Giroux 1997), and so the list can go on. They do all this and more by living their teaching, by embodying their passion for learning, for living and for humanity and the planet.

For me they are all, one way or the other, knowingly or unknowingly, connected to mystery. They help us see things not just as they are but as they could be, and they provide the skills and foster the confidence to move individually and collectively in these more desirable and sustainable directions.

Collectively such educators enable me to live with irony. Hence I try to teach across time and beyond time. I, like the French philosopher Rousseau, have thrown away my watch (Whitrow, 2003, p. 4). In this sense I am a bureaucrat's worst nightmare. I am disinterested in slots of time devoted to this or that subject. To invite mystery into the human world we must eliminate the walls that shut it out. Time is one such wall and must be reinvented in order to sustain dreamtime classroom experiences (Perkins 2001).

Zeus and Odin share my teaching space with computers! When I work with primary students we talk about cells and mitosis and at the same time I tell stories about life dragging itself through the primeval slime, and the gods of old struggling with titanic forces. My teaching has its emotional roots in the mythic exploration of meaning and scales the walls of *techne*, and is soon to be at play in the cybernetic Elysian (I hope it is not Tartarus) fields of the internet and the web². I use a lot of story, but also some very high level academic ideas in which kids are handling concepts in maths and language that are usually reserved for much older students. It has been my experience that their exposure to the abstract and value challenging world of myth develops imaginative will and the depth and subtlety to handle cognitively complex ideas with relative ease (Bussey & Inayatullah 2006).

Thus embedded in a mythic learning culture, the knowledge base needed to take on our world at the physical level is imparted without the fuss and repressive practices that normally accompany such learning. Story punches holes in the mundane and frees us to become our potential. It is an invitation to *autopoiesis* that has powerful healing and aspirational possibilities (Baker 2007). Story also leads children and adults alike to develop their visioning ability thus equipping us all with visionary material and skills to generate more positive images of the future (Hutchinson, 1996). In this sense I am engaging a deep futures process to develop consciousness of purpose and agency. This goes a long way to reverse the constructed pessimism Nagel (2005) identifies as a product of mainstream environmental education programmes. One way that myth conveys this deep futures sense is by linking us all in a shared story, the story is of course richly archetypal, but it is also a direct link with the ancient world and the

¹ For more on neohumanism see: Sohail Inayatullah, Marcus Bussey & Ivana Milojevic (2006) *Neohumanist Educational Futures: Liberating the Pedagogical Intellect*, Tamsui, Tamkang University Press.

² I am one of the associates of Prout College and will be teaching online courses as of 2007. See www.proutcollege.org

future as the story transcends temporal definition and parameters. This leads me to another reflection.

Teacher as Link

I, like all teachers, and all beings, am a link in a chain (multiple links; multiple chains) that goes back to the dawn of time. As a teacher (and human being) I am what Deleuze describes as “a heterogenous or heteromorphic creature” (1993: 9) who is part of a multitude of traditions. Some are broad, like the maths tradition and the language tradition while others are more specialized like the guitar tradition or the history tradition; still others are more esoteric but rich and mysterious like the neohumanist, Tantric and yogic traditions. I am a vector of specific cultural strands – Deleuze’s rhizomes – and I happily go around infecting as many people as I can.

We are all part of a learning field, a field of meanings that is forged from a myriad traditions and experiences going back into prehistory, a field steeped in the mysteries that make us human. Current learning patterns are seeking to blind us to much of this inheritance – the associative connections – by prescribing what and how we learn. By reducing the parameters of what is worthwhile knowledge, modernity has greatly suppressed the broad and beautiful experience of being human.

So as a teacher attuned to community both past, present and future I carry my students some way into this world; myth is the vehicle for the young, for adults I communicate the same through an acknowledgement of debt. Today’s prosperity is built upon centuries of exploitation of indigenous cultures, the working class and the natural resources of the planet. Today we continue this process under the banner of globalization, yet we are so inured to the imbalances that they seem innate features of the modern landscape. The future, too, is also being exploited with the physical and social resources of future generations being strip mined for the benefit of a generation that will never have to pick up the tab.

This over-arching vision links us all, implicates us all, and makes us all vulnerable. The only response is to take sustainability personally, to begin the slow process of remembering who we are and activating the multilayered strands that underpin an integrated sustainability that can generate transformative educational practice. The will to live (and teach) sustainably is constructed. It is anchored in physical commitment, driven by intellectual clarity, sustained by emotional resilience, empowered by ethical integrity and unified with spiritual depth. This leads me to the following reflection.

Diving into Mystery

In order to teach sustainably a teacher needs to be engaged in some form of transformative reflective practice that creates the inner space to honour their interconnectedness and debug their conditioned partialistic responses to relationship. And relationship, as Thomas Berry reminds us (1990), is central to any sense of our interconnectedness with this world we inhabit. This is what Sarkar recognized and placed central to any neohumanist experience of life (Sarkar 1998). We all, in our own way, need time to reflect, to go deep within. This is essential, and also deeply personal. There are no hard and fast rules here. I meditate but my wife sings and my mother paints. We are all teachers. Holistic educator John Miller, has recently argued:

In holistic learning, teachers must also nurture their own deeper selves. I encourage teachers to set aside time during the day to develop their inner life. Activities like gardening and meditation allow us to make the transition from a calculating to a listening mind. Another technique is mindfulness. (1999: 48)

When we can find this depth meaning floods us. Everything becomes alive and we have a relationship, a kinship with everything, and furthermore we come to know and understand this relational world through a new kind of rationality based on love (Gallegos Nava 2001). Love is integrative because it breaks down the ego and allows us to be part of life rather than above it, constrained by the distance that is the hallmark of intellectual rationality. Love, for the Mexican educator Gallegos Nava, builds order. It is anchored in the spiritual. This is a spirituality that is lived, not romanticised and must be communicated through its embodiment in the classroom. Thus he observes:

Spirituality is the creative energy of the universe and the essence of holistic (read sustainable) education. Spirituality cannot be taught academically or linearly, since it transcends the academic disciplines. In education, it is also a state of awareness, one of inner order that, as educators, we can only encourage by our own conduct and holistic (read sustainable) dialogue. (2001, p. 39)

To plant the seed of sustainable holistic consciousness in others through teaching, requires the teacher to be addressing students, no matter what age, from a place in this new space. Whatever integrity and authority I have comes from this new place. I communicate most of this without words, simply by being me, engaged in my own transformative process,

sharing its mystery with those around me. Teaching at this level is not about proselytising or preaching, it is about being. Embodying, however inadequately, links to mystery that forms as a result of spiritual activity. The reflective, meditative space is my link with the cosmic. Without this link and the force it brings to my being, I am unable to overcome the divisive world view that is my immediate inheritance and the dominant expression of my consciousness - bound and distorted as it is.

Sustainable Education

Integrity is central to my approach to education. Mystery is the cement that disregards boundaries and pours into everything we do. We activate this capacity through critical spiritual engagement. This sensibility requires us to be mindful of our physical actions – what we eat, how we treat our body and the bodies of others, and also the material expressions of this universe (physical sustainability). It also requires that we work carefully to debug our thinking – remove prejudice and irrationality from our minds through critical reflection and the testing of ideas, assumptions and aspirations (intellectual sustainability). We must make sure that our actions are reflexive and ethical – motivated by benevolence and a sense of the interconnected nature of the universe (ethical sustainability). Furthermore, we must also ensure that our emotional world is rich, because a dry well cannot care for others (emotional sustainability). Finally, we must nurture and strengthen our spiritual centre through regular meditative dwelling upon/within mystery however that is characterised (spiritual sustainability).

To westerners it is natural to see in this layering a hierarchy, either of needs or of value, yet I want to warn against any such ordering as all are equally involved in sustainable living. I am reminded here of Vivekananda's warning that we not spend too much time philosophizing or meditating. This is often an excuse for inaction in a world torn by injustice and marred by suffering. For him the formula for balanced, sustainable praxis involved both the I and the other:

“The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good is not ‘I’ but ‘thou’. Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt.” (quoted in Giri 2003, pp. 5-6).

Another Indian teacher, P. R. Sarkar made the same point when he linked personal liberation with social action. Sustainable education, as a holistic pedagogical process, is a perfect way to engage in this twofold process. It opens practitioners to the multiple contexts that make us human, enriching our interactions with others and with the planet while deepening our sense of the relevance of spirit and mystery in all we do.

The most amazing experiences of my teaching career have been unsolicited moments when mystery breaks through the surface and magic really does happen. At such unplanned moments we find limitations fall away. An example of this is the musical transformation that overtook my class between 1999 and 2003 when students individually and collectively gravitated towards the guitar (my instrument). They would be found sitting in small groups, or individually, around the school playing piece after piece, over and over again. The overall effect of this cannot be quantified – what I can say is that the children were different, the school and the school community were also different. This is hard to put your finger on. The kids felt strong, and many a personal pain was diminished. But they also felt connected, special, alive, excited, tuned in, respectful and hopeful. This was particularly noticeable during the days and weeks following the attack on the Twin Towers. We sang and played our shock and grief, and fear too.

Such unheralded moments remind me that sustainability can only emerge when we embrace it, not as an end in itself, but as an attitude towards life and living. Embodied education conceptualises this process as an integral stance that links teacher, student, community, humanity and the universe in one broad sweep of endeavour. From this perspective I must acknowledge that sustainable education is not something I do, it is something I am, not as an isolated individual but as a fully contextualised social being sharing this hazardous moment in history.

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About the Author

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My central interest is in developing transformative teaching processes that generate sustainable life values and skills in students, their families and the community. I have taught in holistic environments with both a spiritual and social focus. Neohumanist futures education is a central theme in my intellectual and practitioner life and I have just finished editing a book with that title with Sohail Inayatullah and Ivana Milojevic. I use creative and interior processes to open children and their families to the possibility of social and personal change that validates sustainable life choices. My work builds on critical pedagogic methodology, extending this field through the application of critical spirituality. My interests are in trans-civilizational dialogue in which I use various categories (linguistic, social, aesthetic, etc...) to challenge assumptions that close down future possibilities. At present I am particularly interested in contrasting the work of Gilles Deleuze and Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar as a set of coordinates for this civilizational dialogue. A new book on educational futures will be out next year. Here are the details: *Alternative Educational Futures: Pedagogies for an Emergent World* Bussey, Inayatullah & Milojevic, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, 2008.

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