

6 Ethical perspectives

6.1 Developing spiritual intelligence and higher consciousness

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Addressing spiritual intelligence provides opportunities for students to honor life's most meaningful questions: How can I make a difference? Why am I here? Does my life have meaning? Discussing such questions engages students with something larger than their ego; connecting to the lives of others, to nature and to the mystery of being alive. In this chapter, spiritual intelligence is defined as the capacity to use a multi-sensory approach, including intuition, meditation and visualization to tap one's inner knowledge to solve problems of a global nature (Sisk and Torrance 2001).

The psychological base for spiritual intelligence

Carl Jung was convinced that myths represent what is universally known by everybody, linking us with our past and to contemporary human society (Campbell 1971). Jung's four functions of consciousness are *sensing* and *intuition* by which facts and the fact-world are apprehended; *feeling* and *thinking* involved in judging and evaluation. Feeling and intuition are essential to the development and use of spiritual intelligence. Jung (1969) described the theory of synchronicity, as an inner psychic condition and an external event coming together in a way that can be perceived as having a meaningful coincidence.

Dabrowski (1967) divided his theory of disintegration into two parts: Over-excitabilities (Oes) which interact with special talents and abilities of the individual. He identified five over-excitabilities (Oes) – psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual and emotional – which interact and manifest in capacity to care, insatiable love of learning, vivid imagination and endless energy. These capacities form the core of spiritual intelligence (Sisk and Torrance 2001). Individual development comes through a process of lower cognitive-

Table 6.1.1 Dabrowski levels of positive disintegration

Level I (Primary Integration)	<p>Individuals at this level are described as being primarily egocentric, rigid and stereotypical.</p> <p>Level I individuals lack empathy and self-examination, and they tend to blame others when something goes wrong.</p>
Level II (Unilevel Disintegration)	<p>Individuals are influenced by their social groups, and they are moral relativists with no clear-cut set of self-determined values.</p> <p>Level II individuals display the beginning of shame, and extreme or changeable identification with others.</p>
Level III (Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration)	<p>Individuals have developed a hierarchical sense of values, and their inner conflict is made up of a struggle to live up to their higher standards.</p> <p>Level III individuals can become depressed and anxious with their perceived lack of achieving these established goals.</p>
Level IV (Organized Multilevel Disintegration)	<p>Individuals are well on the way to self-actualization, and they have figured out how to reach their ideal goals.</p> <p>Level IV individuals manifest high levels of responsibility, reflective judgement, empathy and authenticity.</p>
Level V (Secondary Integration)	<p>Individuals have mastered their personal struggle regarding self, and disintegration has been transcended by the integration of their values and ideals.</p> <p>Level V individuals live a life in service to humanity, and according to the highest universal principles of love and compassion; manifest dynamisms of responsibility, autonomy, empathy, and perfection.</p> <p>Level V individuals are committed to universal principles; identify with humanity; and their lives reflect the compassion and forgiveness that represent the core of their being.</p>

Source: Dabrowski and Piechowski 1977.

emotional structures being disintegrated and replaced by higher level structures (Table 6.1.1).

Carl Rogers (1980) had a deep trust in human nature, and said people have an internal biological drive to fully develop their capacities and talents, which he called the actualizing tendency. Rogers, like Jung, suggested that people are influenced by feeling-experiencing processes, and information processing which may be akin to dream-states and meditation. Rogers proposed the *Qualities of the Person of Tomorrow* (Rogers 1980), and Table 6.1.2 includes many of the qualities of spiritual intelligence (nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 12).

Table 6.1.2 *Qualities of the Person of Tomorrow*, by Rogers

1	Openness (open to new experience and ways of seeing and being)
2	Desire for authenticity (value of open communication)
3	Skepticism regarding science and technology (distrust of science used to conquer nature and people; sees science used to enhance self awareness)
4	Desire for wholeness of life, body, mind and spirit
5	Wish for intimacy, new forms of communication and closeness
6	Process person (aware that life is change, welcomes risk-taking and the change process)
7	Caring (eager to help, nonjudgemental)
8	Symbiotic attitude toward nature (ecologically minded, feels alliance with nature)
9	Anti-institutional (antipathy for highly structured, bureaucratic institutions)
10	Authority within (trusts own experiences and moral judgements)
11	Unimportance of material things (money and material status symbols not main goal)
12	Yearning for the spiritual (wish to find meaning and purpose in life that is greater than the individual)

Source: Rogers 1980: 350–351.

Maslow (1968) described human evolution through five basic categories of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, all leading towards self-actualization. Maslow said that satisfaction of lower needs (Deficit values), allows higher needs (Being values) to be fulfilled. Being values are associated with growth motivation and expanded horizons, and include wholeness, perfection, justice, beauty, uniqueness, creativity – all important aspects of spiritual behavior. Maslow also developed his concept of peak experiences as movement toward perfect values, and he described self-actualized people as individuals who manifest the positive qualities of self-awareness, creativity, spontaneity, openness to experience, self-acceptance, and the special qualities of democratic character and social interest.

From this brief summary of the key tenets of Jung, Dabrowski, Rogers, and Maslow, several concepts of spiritual intelligence emerge. Dabrowski's Level V of development in which individuals live a life in service to humanity with love and compassion, represent the core behaviors of spiritual intelligence (Sisk and Torrance 2001). Individuals with the capacity to care, and insatiable love are individuals who manifest spiritual intelligence or self-actualization as described by Maslow (1968). They demonstrate the *Qualities of the Person of Tomorrow* as described by Rogers (1980). People manifesting spiritual intelligence are open to a multisensory way of knowing, using the core capacities of meditation, intuition, and visualization as proposed by Jung (1969).

The scientific base for spiritual intelligence

Science as a search for truth

Neuroscientist Candace Pert (1997) describes science as a spiritual endeavor that explores the linked system of 'bodymind'. Pert concludes that neuropeptides

(strings of amino acids) are responsible for emotions, not just anger and fear, but also awe and bliss. Pert (1997) emphasizes the important role of intuition in her scientific discoveries and says that a higher intelligence comes to us via our molecules and cannot be received from the five senses alone.

Consciousness in the brain

The brain research conducted by Rodolfo Llinas and Urs (1993) suggests that consciousness or mind is a state of the brain that is intrinsic, rather than the result of sensory experiences, and that when we dream, the brain switches off the outer world and attends to its inner processes. Zohar and Marshall (2000) report that the brain appears to have a transcendent dimension, and the brain can synthesize perceptual and cognitive events into a larger more meaningful whole.

Energetic network

Caroline Myss (1996) suggests that the human body can be viewed as a vast energetic network where spirit, matter, and power intersect. Myss has studied this energy system and its link to consciousness and spiritual traditions, demonstrating how the body encodes thought, converts it into matter, and stores it within specific areas of the body.

Greg Braden (1997) also discusses the interconnectedness of the body with energy. Magnetite can be found in the brains of birds and mammals, including humans, and it allows us to tune into, and to respond to, the magnetic field of the earth. Braden reports that previous cultures were sensitive to this and built temples or used natural sites which exhibited the requisite geographical cyclic conditions to tap altered states of consciousness.

Everything in the universe is connected

Fritjof Capra (1991) says that the image of the universe is that of an interconnected, dynamic whole whose parts are interdependent and need to be understood as patterns.

From this exploration of science, there emerges a concept of a conscious universe in which we interact as part of a continuous connected process of unity. The brain research of Llinas (1987) and Ramachandran and Blakeslee (1998) suggests that there may be an intrinsic area of the brain, the temporal lobe, that can be included as a brain state of spiritual intelligence.

The basis for spiritual intelligence derived from ancient wisdom and eastern mysticism

Thoth, an ancient Egyptian sage, is credited with the invention of sacred hieroglyphic writing, and he is portrayed as a scribe with the head of an ibis. The ancient Greeks identified Thoth with their god Hermes, the guide of souls in the

realm of the dead. Hermes promoted reflection and meditation, and taught that an enlightened being belongs to nature, and feels unity with everything.

The ancient Essenes were communal agriculturists living in harmony with nature: a simple, peaceful life with a pure tradition of eating no meat or drinking alcohol. The Essenes' practice of the 'communions' expressed an exceptional knowledge of psychology: the morning communion opened the mind to harmonious forms of energy and brought them into the physical body, the evening communion put the subconscious into contact with the superior cosmic forces, and the storehouse of information so that problems can be solved during sleep. The Essenes linked body and the mind to form a dynamic unit: they believed love to be the primordial source of energy, harmony and knowledge, providing dynamic harmony to all cells, organs, and senses. They believed 'will' to be the key to the manifestation of this great source of energy through creative imagination.

There are three central concepts in the Sufi tradition: the heart, the self, and the soul. Heart refers to the spiritual heart that contains our intelligence, wisdom, and power to love. In western culture, logical reasoning is considered the highest human skill; the Sufi tradition calls this the lower intellect, useful in schooling, and in learning skills related to worldly success. The Sufi's higher intellect enables understanding of spiritual truths and the meaning of life. Abstract intellect, according to the Sufi tradition, must have the light and wisdom of the heart.

The essence of Hinduism is found in *Moksha* or liberation. When one experiences concretely and personally that everything is Brahman (the inner essence of all things), then one becomes liberated and recognizes that everything is connected, sensing the unity and harmony of all nature, including ourselves.

Buddhism enshrines four Noble Truths. The first truth accepts that the human situation is suffering; the second truth attributes the cause of all suffering to our clinging and grasping; the third truth states that suffering can be ended when we reach a state of liberation called Nirvana. The fourth truth points to an eightfold path: Right Belief, Resolve, Speech, Right Conduct, Daily Occupation, Effort, Alertness, and finally the ecstasy of Selfless Meditation.

Zen teaches that words cannot express ultimate truth: Zen Enlightenment is active participation in everyday life, not withdrawal from it, and when Enlightenment is attained, there is wonder and mystery in every single act. Zen stresses naturalness and spontaneity to focus on the process of Enlightenment, to realize that we become what we already are from the beginning.

The major purpose of Confucianism is to provide an ethical basis for the traditional Chinese family system, life in society and ancestral worship. Taoism is concerned with observing nature and discovering the way or 'Tao'. Human happiness in Taoism is achieved by following the natural order, acting spontaneously and trusting intuitive knowledge. The Chinese believe in an ultimate reality that underlines and unifies all things, and is an all-embracing whole.

Confucianism is rational, masculine, active and dominating, whereas Taoism is intuitive, feminine, mystical, and yielding, and the contrast of yin and yang is reflected in these two dominant trends of thought.

Jewish Kabbalah teaches that the human being consists of a spirit that represents the highest degree of existence, a soul which is the seat of good and evil attributes, and a coarser spirit or life of the senses that is closely related to the instincts of animal life. Above the life of the senses soars the soul, and above the soul soars the spirit which is ruled and illuminated by the light of the life.

The Native American philosophy is earth-centered, and the creator is manifested in every bush and tree, in the gifts of food and shelter, in nurturing, and in the fulfillment of the everyday needs of life. Native Americans believe in the interconnectedness of all things, the circular nature of the universe, and the rightness of both birth and death in the overall scheme of creation. Eastman (1980) said everything has a soul, the rocks, the seven directions, the wind and water, the earth and fire, the plants and animals, the sun, the moon and stars. The Sioux Native American tradition teaches that spirits can step out of the body, and spirit travel. Mails (1991) says that in the old days, people did not separate daily life from spiritual life: when Fools Crow was asked to describe spiritual power, he said that it felt like energy or electricity when it moves through you.

Native American people tapped their intuition through visions, and they believed one gains wisdom by visualizing. They believed in the intuitive way of knowing, and preferred innermost thoughts over learning through the senses.

The ancient wisdom and eastern mysticism, and the wisdom and traditions of Native American and indigenous people share a common strand for building a concept of spiritual intelligence: the concern for unity, and the interrelation or connectedness of all things, with all things viewed as interdependent and inseparable from the cosmic whole, the Creator and Creative force. Ultimate reality is called 'Brahman' in Hinduism, 'Dharmakaya' in Buddhism, 'Tao' in Taoism and 'Wakan-Tanka,' by the Native American. These common elements are similar to the fundamental feature of the world-view of a conscious universe that emerges from science.

The role of education in developing spiritual intelligence

Support is growing for home schooling in the United States, and for the use of federal funds for private religious schools: some individuals are reacting to perceived hostility toward their views; some resent the neutrality of the schools; and others feel that schools are ignoring the central aspect of living a meaningful life. With the growing cultural diversity in schools all over the world, and more children representing Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist traditions in their families – learning about other religious traditions may help to prevent cultural wars in our schools. Palmer (1999) describes the current challenge to education:

Fear is everywhere – in our culture, in our institutions, in our students, in ourselves – and it cuts us off from everything. Surrounded and invaded by fear, how can we transcend it and reconnect with reality for the sake of

teaching and learning? The only path I know that might take us in that direction is the one marked spiritual.

(Palmer 1999: 6)

Palmer (1999) says the price that has been paid for a system of education so fearful of things spiritual is that it fails to address the real issues of life – dispensing facts at the expense of meaning, and information at the expense of wisdom. Such schooling alienates and dulls, and he defines ‘spiritual’ as a quest for connectedness with self, with others, with the worlds of history and nature, and with the mystery of being alive. This definition represents spiritual intelligence as proposed by Sisk and Torrance (2001). The disciplines of history, physics, psychology and literature can be taught using connectedness as an organizing theme. Teachers can focus on the big picture, and provide students opportunities to explore how connectedness applies to them as individuals.

Palmer (1999) has created a teacher training program *The Courage to Teach* during which teachers examine the spiritual questions that are at the heart of the season in which they attend. Teachers report several outcomes; for example, feeling more grounded and flourishing in their selfhood and home lives, and less likely to burn out, and feeling that they are better teachers, able to deal with conflict and change peacefully and with hope.

Educators want to address the broader implications of Gardner’s (1983) interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, Goleman’s (1995) emotional intelligence, and the interconnectedness of learner and teacher, local and global communities, and the cosmic world which represent the core of spiritual intelligence (Sisk and Torrance 2001). Suhor (1999) says that the current diversity in schools provides access to many traditions and strategies including writing from the inner self: he forecasts greater recognition of methods like imaging and meditation saying spirituality grows in classrooms when teachers view themselves as agents of joy and conduits for transcendence, rather than merely as licensed trainers or promoters of measurable growth.

Noddings (2000), at Teachers College, Columbia University, has developed curriculum to address spiritual questions, suggesting that teachers address the existential questions of ‘How should we live?’ ‘Is there meaning to life?’ ‘Why is there something, rather than nothing?’ She also recommends that schools have gardens and animals so that students experience and build a strong awareness of, and connection with, nature.

Sisk and Torrance (2001) stress that spiritual intelligence develops through compassion, interconnectedness with self and others. Students need to solve real ethical dilemmas of today: they need to explore the core values underlying compassion, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect, and applying these core values in education will

- build a common language
- help define a common purpose
- develop and maintain trust

- influence the school climate to enhance the teaching and learning goals
- provide the basis on which to nurture the spirit, and create a deeper sense of meaningfulness.

Wesley (1999), a principal in New York, says education is about content and theme, full of energy and pathos, and master teachers give themselves fully and selflessly to their art. He emphasizes that most students have little identity beyond home and school, and feel they are anonymous nobodies, but through the way teachers treat, challenge, and coach students, they can become somebodies. He stresses that believing in students is not only good for them, but is a powerful ennobling experience for teachers.

Miller (1999), a professor at the University of Toronto in Ontario, says holistic, connected learning can provide a broader vision of education, as well as improve academic ability and performance. He suggests a balance between individual and group learning, analytic and intuitive thinking, content and process, and learning and assessment. He stresses the need for classrooms to become learning communities, places where people know one another, and feel responsibility toward the total environment.

Many educators are aware that students are seeking answers to questions about the meaning of life, and there is a need to encourage spirituality in the classroom. The Passages Program (Kessler 1999) addresses six interrelated yearnings: the search for meaning and purpose, the longing for silence and solitude, the urge for transcendence, the hunger for joy and delight, the creative drive and the need for initiation. She stresses that if we are educating for wholeness, citizenship and leadership in a democracy, spiritual development belongs in school.

Many school districts have added service learning projects to their gifted programs, and to requirements for graduation. Krystal (1999) says that service learning should be at the core of every curriculum because it provides purpose for students, and nurtures their spirit as few experiences can. Students report that service learning helps them to know they can make a difference in someone's life, and in their community.

Earth Force in Alexandria, Virginia, is a service learning program that can be integrated into science or social studies, and it follows a six-step process:

- take a community environment inventory
- select a problem
- research the problem and investigate the cause
- identify options for influencing policy and practice, and look for ways to define a course of action
- plan and take action in the civic arena
- celebrate and assess the completion of the project.

Boston (1999) calls this a transforming experience in the lives of students.

Brown (1999) says that spiritual education is not about creating some kind of educational Nirvana, it is about waking up to the sacredness of everyday

Table 6.1.3 Likely traits of spiritual intelligence and ways to strengthen for learning

<i>Likely traits</i>	<i>Ways to strengthen for learning</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses inner knowing • Seeks to understand self • Uses metaphor and parables to communicate • Uses intuition • Sensitive to social problems • Sensitive to their purpose in life • Concerned about inequity and injustice • Enjoys big questions • Sense of Gestalt (the big picture) • Wants to make a difference • Capacity to care • Curious about how the world works/ functions • Values love, compassion, concern for others • Close to nature • Uses visualization and mental imaging • Reflective, self-observing and self-aware • Seeks balance • Concerned about right conduct • Seeks to understand self • Feels connected with others, the earth, and the universe • Wants to make a difference • Peacemaker • Concerned with human suffering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide time for reflective thinking • Use journal writing and processing • Study lives/works of spiritual pathfinders • Use problem-solving (predicting) • Conduct service learning projects • Use personal growth activities • Use problem-based learning on real problems • Provide time for open-ended discussion • Use mapping to integrate studies/big themes • Develop personal growth activities • Service learning projects • Integrate science/social science • Use affirmations/think-about-thinking • Employ eco-environmental approach • Read stories and myths • Use role playing/sociodrama • Goal setting activities • Process discussions • Trust intuition and inner voice • Stress unity in studies • Use what, so what, now what model • Negotiation-conflict sessions • Study lives of eminent people

learning. He stresses by separating the intellect from the other senses and from the body itself, all of our intelligence suffers.

Educating for spiritual development embodies the goal of developing students capable of discovering what is essential in life; and ways to strengthen spiritual intelligence for learning are listed in Table 6.1.3.

Conclusion

Inherent in the seven ways of developing your spiritual intelligence is finding a sense of purpose, and creating a vision (Table 6.1.4). Once the vision of your goals is created, then you will need to make a commitment to these goals, followed by an intention to carry through toward your identified goals. It is essential for the development of your spiritual intelligence that you sense the connectedness of everything-to-everything, and to shift your locus of authority and perception in your life from external to internal. Equally essential to the development of your spiritual intelligence is for you to recognize and to honor your relationship to the earth.

Table 6.1.4 Seven ways to develop or raise your spiritual intelligence

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- 1 Think about your goals, desires, and wants in order to bring your life into perspective and balance, and identify your values
 - 2 Access your inner processes and use your vision to see your goals, desires, wants fulfilled, and experience the emotion connected with this fulfillment
 - 3 Integrate your personal and universal vision, and recognize your connectedness
 - 4 Take responsibility for your goals, desires and wants
 - 5 Develop a sense of community by inviting more people into your life
 - 6 Focus on love and compassion
 - 7 When chance knocks at your door, invite it in, and take advantage of coincidences
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Key questions

- 1 How are the principles of global education connected to the development of spiritual intelligence?
- 2 What role does locus of control play in the development of spiritual intelligence?
- 3 How can teachers of diverse gifted students develop their ethical perspectives while celebrating their ethnic diversity?

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6.2 Reclaiming soul in gifted education: the academic caste system in Asian schools

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In Singapore, as in other Asia-Pacific countries such as Hong Kong, Korea and Japan, intense academic competition pervades schools. Although Singapore has impressive performance in international mathematics and science competitions (Keys et al. 1996), a recent poll of at least twenty countries reported that Asian students scored second-lowest in *enjoyment* of math and science (School daze 2002).

The academic caste system

Academic success in a school culture of ruthless academic competition leaves many students increasingly dissatisfied with themselves, as pointed out by a 14-year-old student: ‘In some ways, school encourages superficial success, because society encourages this’ (Heng 1999). A number of fundamental questions follow: Do schools educate for life? Is there meaning to school beyond the academic ‘A’? Roeper (1995: 142) cautions: ‘education has become a one-sided (academic) instrument. . . it does not stress the development and the growth of the self. Yet it is this inner self . . . that is the central point of their lives’.

In a twelve-nation survey in 1998, Singaporean youth rated goals of ‘getting rich and having social position’ as a major aspiration. A subsequent study (Wake-up call for Singapore youths 2000) indicated that Singaporean teenagers exhibit narrow-mindedness, tend to be smug and egocentric, and see the paper chase as the means to a good life. Hong Kong conducted a similar youth survey in 1998, and the results revealed that 30 percent of respondents equated success with good academic results, 25 percent rated ‘fulfillment of goals’ and 15 percent

rated ‘having a prosperous career’ as measures of success (Commission on Youth 2002). The then Acting Education Minister, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, pointed out that Singaporeans make good employees but few can think out-of-the-box, much less lead. Furthermore, Singaporeans tend to be more interested in sustaining their current lifestyle rather than pursuing their dreams (Changing in time for the future 2003).

In Hong Kong, admission to prestigious kindergartens and primary schools is competitive, often requiring interviews and examinations. Parents begin planning by relocating their homes near the preferred school; children are prepared for entry examination(s) two to three years in advance with interview skills, musical skills and knowledge, language proficiency in Mandarin and English, and problem-solving skills. Parents invest tremendous time and resources believing that a good primary school ensures better secondary and university education.

The competitive Asia-Pacific economies have long experienced a school culture that engenders an academic caste system and correspondingly high levels of stress. A survey of 500 students aged between 13 and 19 from Hong Kong, Shanghai and Taiwan found that nearly 40 percent of teenagers polled in Shanghai and Taiwan, and more than 20 percent of those polled in Hong Kong rated study fears as the foremost factor in suicidal thoughts (Teens crushed by study pressure 2003). The survey also reported tremendous pressure from intense competition among peers, high expectations and copious school assignments. In Singapore, one in three primary school children finds life not worth living; nearly four out of five spend as many as three hours daily on homework; and seven out of ten receive extra classes after school (Gregory and Clarke 2003).

Table 6.2.1 is a typical daily schedule for high school students in Korea (School daze 2002). Korean parents typically send their children to ‘cram school’ by age 7 to give their children a headstart on the academic track. Notoriously known for contributing to a childhood of ‘examination hell’, East Asian schools generate an elite of ‘winners’ and an underclass of ‘losers’. The biggest problem with Asia’s schools today is the cumulative, detrimental effects of high-stakes

Table 6.2.1 A typical daily schedule for high school students in Korea

6:50 a.m.	Wakes, gets dressed for school and eats some toast
7:40 a.m.	Walks to school
8:10 a.m.	Attends a 40-minute English comprehension lesson
8:50 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Classes
5:00 p.m.	Eats some rice cakes, starts homework
6:00 p.m.	Private math tutorial
8:00 p.m.	More homework
8:50 p.m.	Leaves home for cram school
9:20 p.m.	Attends English lesson at cram school
Midnight	Teacher drives student home
12:30 a.m.	Arrives home, takes a shower, does more homework, has a snack, plays computer games
2:00 a.m.	Time for sleep – for less than five hours

assessment and an unhealthy focus on school grades: children no longer link substantive learning with schooling as they struggle to cope with relentless, almost crushing, school pressure (Gregory and Clarke 2003).

Reflective of a more pervasive problem of all developed economies, in recent interviews conducted by the *New York Times*, sixth graders showed intense pre-occupation with getting into the right college to gain access to good jobs (Newman 2000). A college freshman survey by the Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles (2004) reported only a small number of college freshmen said it was important to 'develop a meaningful philosophy of life', while interest in being 'well-off financially' was rated the most important.

Many young people today do not have any understanding that their lives have a higher purpose. . . . from the poorest to the most affluent, (they) are imprisoned by our culture's obsession with material things. . . . Instead of fostering meaningful discourse, tolerance of divergent thinking, and the opportunity to get to know ourselves and each other, schools today look more like huge centers for testing preparation.

(Lantieri 2001: 2–3)

Failure to nurture soul in schools: half-sighted versus whole-sighted vision

Webster's (1971: 2176) definition of soul reads: 'the immaterial essence or substance, animating principle, or actuating cause of life or of the individual life'. Kessler (2000: x) refers to soul as the 'inner life – the depth dimension of human experience – a student's longing for something more than material, fragmented existence'. The notion of soul in education does not concern issues of religion, but life philosophy, a more penetrating attempt at 'seeing' and 'knowing.' Western ways of knowing and understanding reality often center on the observable, on perceiving reality as divorced from an understanding of self and others.

The Chinese characters for 'busy' and 'blindness' have the same pronunciation, suggesting figuratively that incessant activity could render people blind to the realities around them. P. Palmer (1993) refers to this as 'half-sightedness', seeing things with only one eye: the other eye, representing spirit or soul, offers another lens to seeing and understanding reality. Palmer argues for 'whole-sighted' education that should reappraise the fundamental assumptions underlying educational policies and practices and the impact they have on children's learning.

In Asia and elsewhere, competitive learning environments are typically characterized by a narrow focus on right answers and test outcomes – half-sighted education. Whole-sighted education encourages learners to question, take risks and pursue passions, looking beyond academic excellence and nudging the learner in pursuit of meaning and purpose.

Most modern teaching, even at university level, is about facts disconnected from a philosophy of the whole (Martin 2000). Thomas S. Popkewitz in Rogers (2000: 269) cautions that a major contradiction exists in which the 'good

intentions of teachers, manifested through their university-certified pedagogical practices, limit the possibilities for genuine intellectual experiences for all children in schools, particularly children of color and poverty’.

Borland (1996: 134) urges educators to question the extent to which we are dealing with something real when we talk about ‘gifted’ and ‘average’ children as if those labels referred to discrete categories of human beings. In our half-sighted classification of children as gifted or learning-disabled, we are grossly simplifying the complexities of learner needs and capabilities.

Education *is* about teaching individuals to read and write, and to acquire skills to earn a living, and grade standards matter; but what about children’s spirit, vision, curiosity and imagination? Should education not also be about celebrating diversity and talents, respect and perseverance? Most importantly, should education not also be about helping children discover meaning, purpose, compassion and joy in life?

The changing nature of community points towards more globalized economies and cosmopolitan living with young people in search of new cultural contexts and identities. Although educators and policy-makers proclaim the importance of education that maximizes children’s potential, the system usually establishes ‘one-size-fits-all’ standard tests to judge success or academic potential. Our world children need an education grounded in a sense of self-realization for living and being.

Reclaiming soul in education through the Evolving Self Model

The Evolving Self Model stems from the authors’ search for meaning and mission, as they sought to understand themselves and aspire to be of service to community. The Evolving Self Model (Figure 6.2.1) delineates four broad philosophical beliefs that guide the individual’s search for self-understanding in relation to family and peers, and the wider perspective of service to the community.

The Evolving Self Model has its conceptual roots in the thoughts and ideas of Confucius and Dewey who embrace the widest perspectives that illuminate ‘soul’ in education. Confucius believed in *living an experience*, and Dewey conceived of experience as the *touchstone of life*.

Confucius charted a developmental path for his students, beginning with the growth of self, then self in relation to achieving family harmony, and then self in relation to peace and order in the empire (J. Palmer 2001). He perceived learning as the foundation of self-development:

If one loves humaneness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is folly; if one loves understanding but does not love learning, the consequence of this is unorthodoxy; if one loves good faith but does not love learning, the consequence of this is damaging behaviour; if one loves straightforwardness but does not love learning, the consequence of this is rudeness; if one loves courage but does not love learning, the consequence of this is

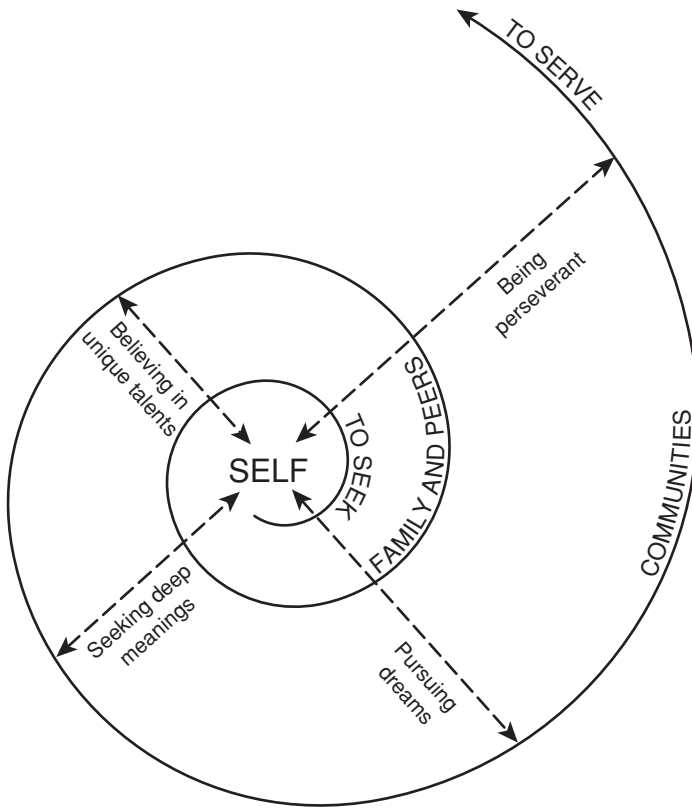


Figure 6.2.1 Evolving Self Model: from seeking self to serving communities.

rebelliousness; if one loves strength but does not love learning, the consequence of this is violence.

(J. Palmer 2001: 1)

Confucius was concerned with finding the right way or *dao* to handle a situation. This involves finding the developmental path that begins with the self, as shown in Figure 6.2.1. The journey begins with a deep understanding of the uniqueness and talents of self. For educators, this means valuing children for their unique talents, striving to understand the whole child. We need to help children answer questions such as: Who am I? What is the meaning and purpose of life?

The second philosophical belief is seeking deep meanings to unite thought and action, morality and fact, body and mind, individual and community (Grange 2003: 15–16). *Dao* seeks real balance, not harmony achieved at the expense of others. Good teachers help students find connection and purposeful direction in their learning, encouraging meta-understanding of self, family, peers and communities.

The third philosophical belief concerns helping children pursue dreams by developing the life of the mind and the spirit: helping children ask big, transcendent questions, developing courage to find a vocation that brings meaning and self-fulfillment.

The fourth philosophical belief highlights the importance of perseverance in pursuing the best for all, and enduring personal hardships.

Resonant with Confucian beliefs, Dewey (1916) was concerned with the enhancement of democratic community together with developing the concept of the unique self. He viewed schools as life itself, rather than a preparation for life.

[We must] make each one of our schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society, and throughout permeated with the spirit of art, history, and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantor of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious.

(J. Palmer 2001: 177)

In summary, we believe that a school culture should be guided by four philosophical beliefs:

- individuals are uniquely talented
- education should seek deep meaning, and help children discover connection and purpose
- children should be encouraged to pursue dreams
- children should develop perseverance through adversity.

What can teachers do?

John Gardner (1984 [1961]: 144) asks if it is possible for people to achieve excellence if they don't believe in anything. He argues that talent in the service of beauty or justice is one thing; talent in the service of greed or tyranny is quite another. Roeper (1997) philosophizes:

True success in teaching gifted children can only be achieved when the passions of the child – her soul and mind – are accepted as the foundations upon which we bridge society's expectations as well as our own.

(Roeper 1997: 166)

She strongly urges educators to nurture the psyche of the child towards self-actualization, while developing understanding of the wider world.

A young Singaporean teacher with a personal record of high achievement, and a recent award acknowledging him as an outstanding educator, says:

I used to cry myself to sleep in secondary school. I needed reassurance that it was okay to question and to search. My parents felt that I had found my path, but I couldn't really communicate with them, in a deep sense. . . . A teacher could have helped to push boundaries to help me find *me*.

Tharman Shanmugaratnam (2004) emphasizes that the greatest challenge in Singapore education is to 'provide more space for kids to pursue their passion . . . [t]o create a culture of intellectual curiosity in children . . . and a spirit of initiative to try something different, even if one might fail'.

Handy (1998) uses the *hungry spirit* as a metaphor for the emptiness people feel after the quest for material and academic success to the exclusion of anything else. He writes:

I am angered by the waste of so many people's lives, dragged down by poverty in the midst of riches. I am concerned by the absence of a more transcendent view of life . . . and by the prevalence of the economic myth which colours all that we do. Money [and traditional conceptions of success] is the means of life and not the point of it. There must be something that we can do to restore the balance.

(Handy 1998: 3)

P. Palmer (1997) writes that we teach who we are: he emphasizes that good teaching cannot be reduced to a technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Good teachers join self, subject and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, the quest to develop the intellect, to realize the self and to search for meaning.

McLeod (1996) describes deep learning as having shifts in cognitions, attitudes, emotions and values. Grauerholz (2001) proposes that teachers use pedagogical approaches that consciously promote student learning on levels beyond the cognitive, incorporate diverse methods that engage students in personal exploration, relate course material to their own lives and help students clarify their own values and responsibilities to others. Teachers need to love questions and to live in search of answers. Pleiss and Feldhusen (1995) emphasize the critical role of a teacher/mentor who not only contributes knowledge and expertise, but also models the self, providing values, vision and life goals.

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1997: 179) identify the development of a personal *life theme* as the ultimate achievement in the path of personal growth. This refers to a process of 'transforming misfortune in one's life – or in the wider social environment – into a goal that gives direction and meaning to a whole life'. This puts the individual on a path of determined perseverance, enabling significant self-growth despite the presence of major obstacles. In their work with adolescent populations, Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1997) note that only a small number of adolescents actually develop authentic life goals. The majority are content to pursue life themes scripted by society, namely, getting a degree, a good job, marriage and children.

Conclusion

Confucius and Dewey viewed education as thinking about life. Writing this chapter has given us an opportunity to look back to our own education and the cultures we grew up with, seeking to understand self in the larger context of humanity beyond self.

Key questions

- 1 Academic biases in the education of children with high ability exist, despite encouraging educational reform efforts on many fronts. Identify possible sources of academic biases in your country. What can be done to minimize or eliminate these biases?
- 2 ‘Half-sightedness’ refers to seeing things with only one eye, with the other eye, representing spirit or soul, offering another lens to seeing and understanding reality (P. Palmer 1993). What are some examples of a half-sighted vision of education? How would perspectives differ with a more whole-sighted vision of education?
- 3 To develop a life or depth dimension in the education of the gifted, the Evolving Self Model put forward in this chapter highlights a culture of school that: (a) believes in the unique talents of all children, (b) seeks deep meaning and helps children discover connection and purpose, (c) encourages children to pursue dreams, and (d) encourages children to be perseverant in times of adversity. What are some specific ways in which teachers could play a part in helping their children?

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6.3 Personal perspective: Muslim gifted – religious education in Saudi Arabia

Aisha Arshad

I am originally from Pakistan, but I lived in a two-bedroom apartment in Al-khobar, Saudi Arabia for sixteen years. The laws are strictly according to Islam, the major religion; crime is rare. We felt lucky living in Saudi Arabia because we could go on a Haj pilgrimage to visit the two holy mosques, Masjod Al-Itaram (Mecca) and Masjod-e-Nabwi (Medina), the location of prophet Muhammad's tomb.

As well as learning English, I learnt the official language, Arabic. The men in Saudi Arabia wear a long white shirt called a *tumb* and a headdress, a *gutrah*. The women have to cover themselves with a black veil called an *abaaya* when they are outside their homes. I started wearing the *abaaya* when I was 10 years old. The Arab women in Saudi Arabia wear long straight dresses that may have embroidery or beads on them and gold jewelry. Women decorate their hands, feet and fingertips with henna. I love decorating my hands with henna for Eid.

Eid is the name of the two Muslim festivals. We celebrate Eid-Al a Fitr, after the month of Ramadhan, by praying, dressing up, giving gifts and visiting family and friends. The second festival, Eidal-Adha, takes place after Haj. Middle Eastern food is light and healthy, consisting of lots of fresh vegetables, rice, chicken, lamb, grains, yogurt sauces and dips, pita bread and cheese. Alcohol is prohibited in Saudi Arabia; there are no illegal drugs there such as heroin because of severe punishment. Women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia and the only jobs they can hold are teacher, doctor or nurse.

In first grade I attended Manarat, a small private Muslim school, and had to wear a uniform: a white blouse under a blue pinafore. We started the day with an assembly reciting the holy Quran, and singing the Saudi national anthem. Based on the British system, we were taught reading, English, Math as well as Arabic and Islamic studies, physical education and art. The younger classes such as kindergarten were coeducational, but from first grade, the class was all girls or all boys.

Up until the ninth grade I attended Dhahran Academy, a coeducational American-based international school. Other than the general subjects, we also had extracurricular courses such as art, music, band, home economics, French, Spanish, Arabic and various sports. Methods of instruction and assessment were varied and included a blend of interesting projects, hands-on activities and field trips. We attended school from Saturday to Wednesday with Thursday and Friday being the weekend. The students could wear anything they wanted within the school dress code. Most of my teachers were from the United States, but the student body was ethnically diverse, and throughout the year this diversity was celebrated. Dhahran Academy was not a religious school, but the various holidays were recognized. After graduating in ninth grade, many of the students went to the United States or different boarding schools around the world.

After completing the ninth grade, I attended Manarat-Al-Sharkia, an all-girls Islamic school, and being used to the American system of education, studies in Manarat, although in English, were at times a challenge for me. Although the majority of the students and teachers were Muslim, they came from various parts of the world such as Asia, North America and Africa. In Manarat, we were required to wear a uniform, and had to cover ourselves with the veil and cover our faces when entering and leaving the school. As Muslims, everyday we had break so that we could observe the afternoon prayer, and that gradually got me to try to pray five times a day facing Mecca. Other than the general education subjects, extracurricular education included arts and crafts, home economics, various sciences, and different clubs that students could join based on their

interests. Islamic studies were part of the curriculum and a Quran and Arabic class.

After completing the tenth grade my family and I moved to Orlando, Florida where I completed my education at University High School, pretty easy for me because it was just like Dhahran Academy including American history. I bought jeans and T-shirts to fit in: it would be awkward to walk around in a *shalwar qamiz* at school! There were hardly any Pakistani students and I really missed that because there are so many Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia. I received my bachelor's degree from University of Central Florida in elementary education, and am currently taking courses towards a master's degree in reading education. What I really like about moving to Florida was that there is more independence and job opportunities. So being independent, such as getting my first job teaching at the Muslim Academy, and driving was something I had to get used to. I love it here. I do really miss Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia and being able to go on a pilgrimage. What I miss most, however, is the peace in Saudi Arabia.

6.4 Conflict resolution 5: religious intolerance

Gillian Eriksson

A student, who was an immigrant from China, had been attending an American elementary school in fifth grade for a few months. This student had a fluency in English, and had demonstrated a keen interest in American culture and history. Much to the dismay of her traditional Chinese parents, she had striven to dress, talk and behave like her American peers. She was very advanced in technology and mathematics and had been referred to the gifted program. The family had lived in a system that had provided no exposure to religion. One day after recess, the student arrived in class very upset and politely asked to speak privately to the teacher. She said that she had met some other students on the playground, who had told her that if she did not believe in Jesus that she would be 'condemned to Hell' when she died. 'Is this really true?' the student asked the teacher.