Where do we go from here?

Our approaches to parenting, schooling, higher education, organized religions, the corporate and private sector, none of these are preparing this most threatened generation is human history to meet the personal, social and ecological challenges they will face.

What follows is a synthesis of forty-years with J. Krishnamurti, David Bohm, Joseph Chilton Pearce, Samdhong Rinpoche and other mentors. The passion, clarity and hope that inspired these teachers etched deeply and took root.

I see what I see standing on their shoulders.
Where do we go from here?
The future of humanity is questionable. In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a Titan, a hero, and trickster. Prometheus defied the gods by stealing fire and giving it to humanity as civilization. In the West, Prometheus grew to represent human striving, particularly the quest for scientific knowledge, and the risk of unintended consequences. Mary Shelley gave The Modern Prometheus as the subtitle to her novel Frankenstein (1818). Indeed, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The underlying theme of the Prometheus myth looms larger today than ever.

**Humanity Has Destroyed Half the Animal and Plant Life on Earth**

The increasing rate of species threatened with extinction that’s alarming biologists is just one feature of the massive transformation humans have wrought on our planet. Another shocking reality is that Earth is far poorer not just in the diversity of life, but also in the raw amount of life.

"If you take the overall biomass on Earth before humanity arrived on the scene, it was about twice what it is now," said Ron Milo, a professor of plant and environmental sciences at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel... Earth's population nears eight billion people, but that only accounts for 0.01% of our planet's overall biomass. Yet, despite the fact that we represent tiny fraction of life on Earth, humanity has had an outsized impact on species around the world that are threatened with extinction. This loss of biodiversity and numbers means we’re eroding the ability of our planet to support life — both natural life and our own growing human population. CBC Radio, 23 October 19

American children have never been sicker. Over half (54%) are suffering from one or more chronic illnesses. The “4-A” disorders—autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, asthma and allergies—have experienced meteoric growth. U.S. children are far more likely to die before their first birthday than infants in other wealthy countries and life expectancy is falling, driven largely by rising death rates in adolescents and younger adults. Social anxiety and depression among children and young adults is epidemic. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in teens, half of whom are reported to have at least one mental, emotional or behavioral disorder. Rising levels of pollution, global technologies combined with a media blizzard and near complete immersive in a scripted experience spawned by political-media-entertainment, designed distract rather than inform, all contribute. Could all of this stem from a simple case of mistaken identity, a pervasive misuse of memory? Is that the root?

I asked David Bohm, considered one of the brightest scientists of the twentieth century, if he was optimistic about the future of humanity. “No,” was his reply, and I paraphrase: “Given the unstable state of human consciousness it appears unlikely that we will survive our own destructive tendencies another hundred or two-hundred years.” As David notes however, the adulterated mind is not the natural order of the mind. That adulterated state is so powerful however, the vast majority never experience the natural order of the mind, our true nature, which is transcendent. Transcendent, as Joseph Chilton Pearce described in the Biology of Transcendence, is a drive to overcome limitation and constraint. Transcendence is, by its very nature, creative, boarding on the miraculous and fundamentally optimistic. Our challenge is to awaken from the spell of culture and model a way of being that is grounded in transcendence, not culture, no matter how big or fatal the dragon appears.

My daughter, Carly Elizabeth, is five-years-old. How do I model a state of being that will awaken and expand in her the capacity to live a full, authentic, even miraculous human life, to break the destructive spell we call Civilization and rediscover who and what she really is – transcendent-nature, and by so doing tip the scales from death back to life in this next, most threatened generation ever? Holding this question spawned several essays, each addressing central themes that together may offer some clarity, hope and creative optimism. Your thoughts and recommendations please.

Michael Mendizza
More of The Same is The Same
The uncertain future of humanity has a direct impact on how we parent and educate; for what, why and how. What the next critical generation needs most is not content as data, information or knowledge. What they need, and most urgently, is to negate their identification with culture which implies the discovery of a new, more authentic identity-reality, and second, they must discover, awaken and develop new states of being, perception and action that are now excluded by our identification with culture. Together, these two forces represent a new, or renewed, direct relationship with life and the natural world along with the opening of new creative capacities that may survive the unprecedented changes we, and every other species, now face.

Negating identification with culture is not replacing one abstract concept for another. Negating this primary identification cuts to the root. Rather than our attention and awareness being immersed in abstraction, which concept as culture is, negating implies lifting attention out of concept altogether. It implies an insight into the very nature and structure of concept as a state of the mind, a distilling or washing the mind free from image and concept. It means seeing and responding directly. With direct perception it becomes obvious that we are not a concept; not an American, French or Russian, not a Democrat or Conservative, not a member of this tribe or that gang, not a Buddhist or Evangelical Christian, not Black, White, Red, Brown or Yellow, not even a Man or Woman. We are human beings, completely interdependent and interconnected with all life forms, including light, soil, wind and water. We are that, all of us together. Nor can intelligence, that mysterious force that brings inert elements to life, be reduced to a concept. The conceptual, intellectual realm is not intelligence.

At the very root, our crisis-in-consciousness emanates from the capacity to imagine, which is the source of image and concept, undisciplined and misused. Paraphrasing environmental educator David Orr, it is not more imagination that will save us but imagination of a certain kind. More of the same will only compound our problems. The worth of parenting and education, and more deeply, imagination and identity, must be measured against standards of ecological-wholeness and wellbeing for all living beings, and that means mutual survival, not as an idea or concept, as a direct experience, what J. Krishnamurti called ‘living the insight.’ A direct experience is an embodied experience, not just a nice idea. Our first and most urgent challenge is to experience the difference between direct experience and concept and move forward from there.

It has been argued that the Age of Enlightenment, 1687 to 1789, and the Scientific Method represented a much needed distilling and focusing of imagination, an uplifting of mind out of infectious fantasy, the supernatural and superstition; superstition being a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation; a black cat crossing your path is bad luck or tales of witchcraft, and magic. The First Enlightenment also attempted to ground reality in the observable, the scientific method, in contrast with the supernatural: belief in an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe, especially: of or relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit, devil, or transcending the laws of nature, often attributed to an invisible agent (such as a ghost or spirit). All well and good for the medieval mind, but clearly limited given our current understanding of quantum physics, parallel or embedded universes.

Central doctrines of the First Enlightenment were individual liberty and religious tolerance, in opposition to an absolute monarchy and the fixed dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church. Individualism, the scientific method and reductionism, along with increased questioning of religious orthodoxy, implicitly abstracted and separated the observer from nature. The First Enlightenment exposed superstitions, abstractions and fantasies, but did not expose the illusions and fantasies we hold about ourselves or culture. Failing to reveal these deeper fantasies, nature became something to be conquered and manipulated, including, and most intimately, the feminine, not as the Taoists insist, life forces to be in alignment with. Abstracted, self-centered individualism and manifest destiny trampled native traditions, such as the Seventh Generation Principle, based on an ancient Iroquois philosophy that decisions made today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future, dating somewhere between 1142 and 1500 AD.
As David Bohm describes in *Thought as a System*, though he never used the phrase, we need to evolve a *Second Age of Enlightenment*, a pervasive and sustained insight, as a direct experience, of the false-hopes and false-fears attributed to image and concept expressing as culture and our enculturated self-image, which includes, of course, the false images we attribute to others, along with artificial divisions such as nationalism and racism and other self-centered and divisive abstractions.

Perceiving directly has ancient roots. In Greek the word, 'mysticism,' meant 'hidden,' more specifically, 'hidden to the mind of image and concept.' A mystic is a person who perceives directly. St. John of the Cross, one of the great exemplars of this tradition, had a beautifully clear image. "If I have my hand in front of my eyes, I cannot see the sun. If I have an image of God, I cannot see God." The *Second age of Enlightenment* Krishnamurti and David Bohm invite applies the same simple logic to the images and concepts we have about self and culture. If we have an image of ourselves, we cannot see what we are. If we have an image, and more importantly identify with our concept of culture, we cannot see culture. Zen Buddhists have their way: "If you see Buddha, kill him." If you see Buddha you are seeing the image, the concept. Negate it. Only then, when the mind is free of imagined images, can we see clearly what is not an image or concept. David Bohm goes further:

Proprioception of Thought

We could say that practically all the problems of the human race are due to the fact that thought is not proprioceptive... The word proprioception is used in biology and medicine and means essentially the same as self-perception or self-awareness.... Is it possible for thought to observe itself, to see what it is doing, perhaps by awakening some other sense of what thought is, possibly through attention?

Proprioception [of thought], together with passion frees the mind from the intellectual-emotional disorder and therefore “heals” it from irrationality and self-deception. The intellect becomes orderly, rational and clear and, therefore, will become intelligent as well. The emotions also will begin to express a more subtle response to true and meaningful feelings, such as love. As a result, the human mind will be creative rather than destructive. This amounts to a transformation of human consciousness on a deep level.

David Bohm

Self-perception or self-awareness of our basic thought process is not something we do easily. Like texting, our day-to-day thought process is a distraction, a virtual reality that enchants. Rip Van Winkle binging on one YouTube program after another comes to mind. Our normal, low-state of attention is completely siphoned onto the show, and the show is culture and the role we play in it. We are not really aware of what we are doing. More to the point, we are not doing it. Most often, thought is running mechanically, as a reflex. The mechanical and reflexive nature of normal thought is the problem and a problem can’t be solved at the level that created the problem. More of the same is the same. Something ‘other’ is required, a completely new approach.

As David suggests, and resonate with Krishnamurti, Buddhist and Christian Mystics, this ‘other’ involves a quality of attention not distracted by imagination, mental images and concepts. Once a new baseline of consciousness is embodied, free from distractions – imagination, thought, mental images and concept are used objectively, as tools, like a hammer pounding a nail, without being identified or motivated by the hammer as an image or concept. When the nail is secure, we stop pounding. The hammer disappears. We, however, are never secure living inside a fear-based-culture. We keep pounding all the time which is crazy, but, driven by threat and fear, we believe constant pounding is both necessary and normal. This is what culture-as-identity is designed to do in a fear-based-culture, and it works beautifully. The distilling of human consciousness Bohm and Krishnamurti describe represents a *Second Age of Enlightenment*. With that, everything changes. Without it, nothing changes. Here we are. Nature is making us an offer we can’t refuse.

The *Second Age of Enlightenment* involves insight, a quality of energy and attention that reveal the reflexive and mechanical nature of normal thought along with the major forces or fields that evoke our false identification with culture and that, simultaneously, maintain culture, including:
• The subject-object syntax of language.
• Contemporary parenting practices based on subject-object projections; comparison, competition, psychological praise, rewards, punishments, stages of psychological becoming, etc.
• The implicit judgements and commandments of theistic, God in the sky, religions.
• Corporate media and technologies, including; psychological self-image based social media platforms and programming that promotes existing cultural images and beliefs.
• Structures of information, data and knowledge-based education that impose comparison, conformity, and obedience to authority in their fundamental design.

All these forces appear perfectly normal and necessary looking from within culture at culture and our identity with it. From a Second Age of Enlightenment perspective, the spell or enchantment that maintains these powerful forces is broken. From this new reality, a quality or state that is not the source of the problem, what might be done to resolve the problem is revealed. No longer wasting all our energy and attention in culture-based-distractions, we free tremendous energy that can be focused, like a laser, on completely new ways of relating to each other and to life, all life.

Attention being the catalyst that awakens, not concept, we understand the distinction J. Krishnamurti made between studying the insights he presented and living them. The Second Age of Enlightenment Bohm and Krishnamurti propose is a lived-experience, a direct perception, not a concept. David and Krishnamurti understood that we can rearrange concepts endlessly, believing we are moving very far, while remaining exactly where we are. Indeed, more of the same is the same. A Second Age of Enlightenment breaks the spell, opening the doors of perception and possibility far and wide, and not a moment too soon.
A Simple Case of Mistaken Identity
You will not find a more distilled or concise description of our personal-global challenge:

Without bringing about order inwardly, psychologically, you cannot possibly have order outwardly.
And the crisis is there. We think the crisis is national, economic, social and so on. The crisis is not out there! The crisis is really inward and we’re unwilling to face that.

J. Krishnamurti
with Michael Mendizza

We are faced with a breakdown of general social order and human values that threatens stability throughout the world. Existing knowledge cannot meet this challenge. Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach. I am suggesting that the very means by which we try to solve our problems is the problem. The source of our problems is within the structure of thought itself.

We don't really understand the nature of our thought process; we’re not aware of how it works and how it’s really disrupting, not only our society and our individual lives but also the way the brain and nervous system operate, making us unhealthy or perhaps even someway damaging the system.

Rational, orderly, factual thought, such as in doing proper science, is valuable but the kind of thought [that is so destructive] is self-centered thought. At first sight one might wonder why self-centered thought is so bad. If the self were really there then perhaps it would correct to center on the self because the self would be so important, but if the self is a kind of illusion, at least the self as we know it, then to center our thought on something illusory which is assumed to have supreme importance is going to disrupt the whole process and it will not only make thought about yourself wrong, it will make thought about everything wrong so that thought becomes a dangerous and destructive instrument all around.

[The ultimate challenge is to] free humanity from the destructive conditioning we’ve been talking about; that is, this conditioning around the self-centered thought which is really an enslavement to absurdity, to destruction, to unhappiness, sorrow, and no other kind of freedom means anything unless we are free from that... Once humanity is free from that conditioning, then the way would be open to creative unfoldment in all sorts of directions.

David Bohm
with Michael Mendizza

Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach includes our model of parenting, education and our relationship to media. Bohm is describing, what I believe is, the true origin of the term original sin. A sin, in its original language, referred to an archer missing the target. In this case the original mistake is the human capacity to imagine forgetting what it is doing and getting lost, believing that the phantoms it created are independent from the thought that created it, with compounding confusion century after century up to the present. We can see this confusion when the persona, originally meaning a theatrical mask, is mistaken for the authentic nature of the person wearing the mask or costume. We show up at the masquerade party called culture, believing that we are the costume we are wearing, and so does everyone else. And all the comparing, the grades, the judgments, punishments and rewards that consume our attention at the party are about the costume and not our true nature. How confussing is that?

Dr. Gabor Maté, author of numerous book including In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts, Close Encounters with Addiction, described our social-self or personality as a coping pattern, a constellation of behaviors specifically designed to navigate the demands and expectations, rewards and punishments that culture presents. In this regard, the Greek persona or mask is similar to the contemporary function of our self-image or personality. Both are costumes worn by our authentic nature to perform a defensive social role. But, and here is where the lens gets fuzzy, the demands and expectations, rewards and punishments that culture present are so relentless that the need for a coping pattern is near-constant, demanding that the coping-mask or personality-costume be on, twenty-four-seven, even in our dreams. Being ever-present, it is easy to see how one would mistake the mask or costume for the real me.
In fact, the need for this coping pattern arises so early in life, and is so powerful, that it is impossible for the developing human to experience their true authentic nature, free from the coping pattern. We assume that the personality-mask is who and what we really are and this mistaken identity becomes our, and everyone else’s, reality. What other choice do we have?

Not only is the mask mistaken for our authentic nature, the constant need for coping quickly renders the pattern automatic, a reflex. Like the eyes blinking when a bright light is flashed, the coping pattern is triggered before we are aware that this triggering is taking place. The entire process operates below our level of awareness. The mask just happens and we, along with everyone else, assume that this is who we are.

In low states of energy and attention, which is our normal state, what we call consciousness and its reality is completely immersed in the mental image-feelings produced by conditioned memory expressing as thought. Bohm refers to this marinating of consciousness as ‘the reflex system.’ He then quickly points out; there is no real intelligence in a reflex - which is why thought has became a dangerous and destructive instrument all around. Add to this our complete identification of ‘self’ with the abstract image-feelings evoked by the language-culture-self-civilization complex, or ‘the mask,’ and the original sin closes and seals tightly shut.

David refers to the inward expression of this original mistake as self-centered thought. The same mistake expresses outwardly as culture; tribalism, nationalism, racism, and our identification with all sorts of beliefs, such as organized religious and psychological dogma, now amplified by technology. Grasping or having an insight into the trick we are playing on ourselves, reveals why the dangerous and destructive nature of thought is compounding exponentially. “The very means by which we try to solve our problems is the problem. The source of our problems is within the structure of thought itself.”

If all of us are mistaken about our true nature, which is nature, and falsely believe we are a noun, Michael, a person, place or thing, instead of a verb, a state of being that is pure process, never the same, not for one second, this original mistake affects everything. Projected outwardly this mistaken identity becomes culture and civilization which then mirrors back and reinforces our false identity. The name Michael, in Western civilization, emphasize a separate person as a thing, a noun. In Native traditions, Dances with Wolves, for example, the name describes a trait or active quality in relationship. Trees don’t have leaves. Natives call leaves, leafing, a verb, a process. In the West we get one name that is more about family status or belief than it is about our true nature. In native traditions the name given reflects some unique quality expressed at that age and stage of development. Laughing Brown Eyes, for example. And this name-trait changes as we change. One’s name reflects his or her ever-changing nature. In native traditions we are given many names throughout our life as our relationship to the world changes. In the West identity is fixed.

And this simple example of our mistaken identity expands infinitely. Inwardly we develop all sorts of psychological fears, phobias and addictions. Outwardly we have nationalism, cultural and religious conflicts, endless wars and aggression. As David Bohm observed: this conditioning around the self-centered thought is really an enslavement to absurdity, to destruction, to unhappiness, sorrow, and no other kind of freedom means anything unless we are free from that... Once humanity is free from that conditioning, then the way would be open to creative unfoldment in all sorts of directions.

Waking up from this mistaken identity demands a quality of energy and attention that is not completely embedded in the false identity. What we think of as the ‘content of consciousness,’ ‘thought’ and ‘knowledge,’ as Bohm points out, is part of the problem and cannot solve the problem it creates. Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach. The key to this completely new approach rests in our recognizing, and deeply, the difference between intellect and intelligence. Joseph Chilton Pearce addresses this distinction:
Our personal awareness, with its ego-intellect, makes up an estimated 5 percent of the total intelligent energy of our brain/mind. (The rest provides the environment and maintains the conditions of, this personal 5 percent.) Yet with this paltry percentage we try to manipulate universal forces of unknown magnitude and then wonder why everything goes wrong.

You will find a distinction in what follows between intellect and intelligence. Intelligence, found in all life forms, strives for wellbeing and continuity; intellect, a human trait, strives for novelty and possibility. Intellect is that impulse within us to solve problems, generally of its own making, and explore possibility. Intellect is evolution’s gamble, and it attempts to both entice us toward and prepare us for a new realm of being. Intellect involves the brain while intelligence involves the heart. Intellect may be likened to a “masculine” side of mind perhaps—analytical, logical, linear, inclined to science, technology, the search for external novelty and invention, while intelligence is more a “feminine” side, open to the intuitive and mysterious interior of life, seeking balance, restraint, wisdom, wholeness, and the continuity and wellbeing of our species and earth.

A breakdown in male-female relations, epidemic among us, is a biological anomaly that has grown out of and is symbolic of the split between mind and heart in each of us. Intellect, trying to usurp nature and the wisdom of the heart for its own ends, has cut itself off from that heart. And like a child cut off from its mother, its entire development is at risk. Indeed, the mother figure is disappearing today, and an orphaned generation falls upon us. We humans do poorly without her. Matrix and guardian of our species, nurturer, source of strength and guidance for untold cycles of millennia, the mother has become the target of the male intellect, swallowed up as a dollar commodity, leaving all of us, male and female, motherless, bereft, and lost. All around us we see the breaking of the bond of heart and mind. From that of mother and infant, child and family, child and earth, young person and society, to the male-female bond upon which life itself rests, we tear at our living earth—our greater mother and life-giver—in an outward projection of our inner anxiety and rage. Should intellect win its battle with heart’s intelligence, the war will be lost for all of us. We will be just an experiment that failed, evolution’s end on a negative note. This book, Evolutions’ End, explains how this is so, why it need not be so, and how we might open to those dimensions within us as intended for us all along.

Quite simply, we have identified with that extremely limited 5%, intellect-image, at the exclusion of the 95%, innate-intelligence, that is our true nature. What we fail to grasp and embody is the simple and obvious fact that living intelligence is not an image or a concept. To a state of conscious attention however, that is constantly overflowing, and therefore preoccupied with mental images and concepts, this living intelligence is invisible. How can we identify with something we don’t see or experience?

The ‘something much deeper, a completely new approach,’ David Bohm suggests awakens spontaneously when attention is free from distracting images and concepts. Attention is the key to awakening true intelligence, not knowledge, thoughts, concepts, or images. Bohm and his friend J. Krishnamurti, call this state of undistracted attention ‘insight.’ Insight creates a portal in the mind where innate intelligence can act in ways that bring our mental images, thoughts and concepts to order. As Joe describes, intellect, which is our current identity, is cut off and isolated from this intelligence, which leaves evolution’s end on a negative note. Our challenge is to wake-up and realize that culture is a masquerade. We are not the mask or costume worn to the party. With this waking-up we discover something infinitely deeper, what we really are and have always been, but forgot. Below is a note to a father whose eighteen-year-old daughter insists on being a boy.

The inner challenges that young people are experiencing are unprecedented, extreme. Our true nature is ‘life’ and life means relationship. We are defined by our relationships. But with what? Long ago, in a galaxy far away, and for millions if not billions of years, our imagination was small and our direct realization of being related with life was big. Life was sacred and so, being related to life, we were sacred too, and this sacredness was a direct perception, a realization, not something imagined. Then, about 50,000 years ago, more or less, our new brain swelled and with it our capacity to create mental images not present to the senses.
Symbols became metaphors, metaphors coalesced in concepts, concepts into ideas, ideas into culture – and loosing track that all this was being projected in our heads, we ever-so-quickly identified with the images we created. When looking outward the image looked like culture. When looking inward the image looked like our social identity – our ego. And because the images were so real and convincing, we became enchanted and forgot who and what we really are – sacred-nature.

The history of civilization is the story of how this enchantment and false identity played out; endless conflicts, greed, competition, murder by the millions. And then came the industrial revolution and Dr. Frankenstein. Technology gained the ability to mimic what was happening in our heads. And then Moors Law, predicting how the computing power of semiconductors would expand exponentially. The capacity to enchant grew more and more powerful... compounding our false identification with the image, rather than what our authentic nature.

With industry and technology came billions of tons of toxic chemicals, including hormone bending molecules that took an egg beater to what nature spent billions of years to crate. And this too morphed into our false-identity with the image as self and as culture.

What is increasingly clear is that more identification with self-as-culture is suicidal, individually and now – globally. Self-as-culture is an image, a fantasy, a masquerade, but we forgot and took the social costume seriously. And what did the mask do? The mask freed our authentic nature to transcend the limitations and constraints imposed by our false identity with culture. The mask freed us from our false-self. But we forgot and mistook the costume for our true, authentic nature and the identity trap deepened.

When we identify with the mask, as with the latest gender fad, we double down on the trap that false identification represents. First, we falsely identified with the norms we call culture. Then we identify with our coping pattern, which is our rebellion-of-choice to be free of that. We rearrange the furniture in the room believing that we are making big changes, when, in truth, we are still playing the same false-identity game. Only the rebellion game is twice as enchanting, twice as conflicted.

True freedom to express our authentic nature, even bent by hormone-emulating chemicals, is to have an insight into the false nature of our masked-identity. This insight transcends both self-as-culture and self-as counter-culture. We see that culture and counter-culture are two sides of the same coin.

The tragedy is; today’s children only know one reality. They don’t know that the culture and their self-image is just an image. They don’t know who or what they really are. So they don’t have any choice but to play the masquerade role for keeps, even if it kills them. From this perspective the show must go on – because the show is all there is. The mask is what and who we believe we are. From the other perspective – discovering our true authentic nature - it’s all a show and it doesn’t matter what roll we play – because it is all just play. Enlightenment is play at its highest level which means not mistaking the mask for the player. But this demands a direct experience, a state of attention and awareness that is free, empty of conditioned image and concept.

If the self is a kind of illusion, at least the self as we know it, then to center our thought on something illusory which is assumed to have supreme importance is going to disrupt the whole process and it will not only make thought about yourself wrong, it will make thought about everything wrong so that thought becomes a dangerous and destructive instrument all around.

[The ultimate challenge is to] free humanity from the destructive conditioning we've been talking about; that is, this conditioning around the self-centered thought which is really an enslavement to absurdity, to destruction, to unhappiness, sorrow, and no other kind of freedom means anything unless we are free from that...

David Bohm
His Holiness the Dalai Lama understands the challenge we face:

His Holiness sets the stage for discovering the reality behind appearances. Our tacit acceptance of things as they seem is called ignorance, which is not just a lack of knowledge about how people and things actually exist but an active mistaking of their fundamental nature.

True self-knowledge involves exposing and facing misconceptions about ourselves. The aim here is to find out how we get ourselves into trouble, then learn how to intervene on the ground floor of our counterproductive ideas.

His central theme is that our skewed perceptions of body and mind lead to disastrous mistakes, ranging from lust at the one extreme to raging hatred at the other so that we are consistently being led into trouble as if pulled by a ring in our nose. By developing insight into this process, we can free ourselves, and those around us, from these endless scenarios of pain.

His Holiness guides readers through a variety of practical exercises to help us break down the illusions we have superimposed over and beyond what actually exists, and learn how to act in the world from a more realistic framework. This calls for valuing the interdependence of all things and appreciating the latticework of our relationships for the meaningful contribution it makes to our lives.

The book’s third part describes how to harness the power of meditative concentration with insight to achieve immersion in our own ultimate nature... to develop in us a clear sense of what it means to exist without misconception. And the way this profound state of being enhances love by revealing how unnecessary destructive emotions and suffering actually are.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama/Introduction by Jeffery Hopkins, PhD.

How to See Yourself as You Really Are, A Practical Guide to Self-Knowledge,

The question is, how do we wake-up ourselves and act in ways that help our children identify with our true, authentic nature instead of the mask?
The Belonging Hoax

Of course we need to belong. Life is relationship. The words abandonment, bonding and attachment rest on the primacy of belonging. The relatively new field of epigenetics, the way the environment shapes gene expression, molding the very essence of life to the ever-changing environment, demonstrates how important it is to belong. Belonging is a matter of life and death, and deep down, we know it.

OK, we say; “I got it.” We all want to belong, to be accepted, to be part of the community, so we do what others do. We imprint the mother language, sing the same songs, eat the same food, attend the same schools, watch the same programs, wear the same styles of clothes, and say the same prayers. Beginning with mother and father, we mold ourselves to the customs, beliefs and values of the tribe. Together these codes of social behavior, patterns that have shaped the environment in which we have lived for thousands of years, is called culture.

Culture defines who we are, inside and out. Externally we define ourselves by conforming to the values and expectations that culture presents. Internally, how we perceive and experience ourselves, the very essence of our self-image, is shaped and defined by the mirror culture holds up to us every minute of every day. The thoughts we think and the feelings we feel are, to a very large extent, predefined by culture. Like clay, belonging implies being pressed into a pre-cast mold. But that is not what we are. Yes, there may be some room to wiggle, what we call individuality, but not much. Wiggle a little too much, fail to conform, not obey or play by the rules, and BAM! You are no longer a member. Not being a member means you are not welcome. Suddenly, the doors to the kingdom slam shut. You are abandoned, alone, psychologically homeless. Not belonging to the social web triggers deeply embodied switches; anxiety, depression, various addictions and self-destructive behaviors. Sometimes what we think is good is bad. The social web has ways of scraping off those who don’t fit. Indeed, belonging is a matter of life and death.

An integral part of what we call culture, this shedding of those who don’t fit, those who do not obey, who no longer pay allegiance and support behaviors that define the tribe, is woven into the life process. This shedding represents a universal life-and-death force that reaches from the simplest cell to the most complex organisms in the known universe, you and me, and is therefore impossible to avoid. Howard Bloom calls this life and death force the Lucifer Principal. Check-mate! The trap slams shut. But wait. Something is wrong with this picture.

We are taught that “being social” is the high road to success. But, who defines what being successful is and at what price? Like the surface of the moon, the history of childhood is potholed with abuse; threats, beatings, incest and rape, to name just a few. We are judged, compared, graded, punished and rewarded from the moment we are born. Century after century we murder each other defending our ideas of faith, nation and race. Today, the more time we spend with “social media,” the more anxious and depressed we become. What we sacrifice for culture’s definition of success is our true human nature and near infinite capacity to learn. Not a good trade, not for a second. Like the mafia, culture makes us an offer we can’t refuse.

Being ‘normal,’ implicit in belonging, means that our interpretations and responses to life are pre-determined, like Pavlov’s dog, automatic and reflexive, but there is no real intelligence in a reflex. The more conservative our self-world view the greater this conditioning sculpts our behaviors. This way, not that becomes automatic. All the other possibilities, everything else is prejudged inferior, if not blatantly wrong. There is an implicit judgement, worse still, a pre-judgement with everything we encounter. And most of this, being reflexive, occurs beneath our level of awareness. The bell rings and we salivate. That is what we become, a bundle of reflexes. It is all we know, and we have fought endless wars and slaughtered untold millions for centuries justifying and defending our pre-judged conditioning. Regardless of the culture or the individual, it’s my way or the highway.
What distinguishes humans from all the others is the capacity to imagine, to use symbols, and now to construct artificial intelligence. Some estimate that the emergence of this extended capacity to imagine blossomed, more or less, 50,000 years ago. Slowly at first, but with exponential complexity, what humans imagined began to replace nature as the epigenetic force that defined what being human looks and feels like. Increasingly, the tribe was defined by ideas and less and less by biology and ecology. For millions of years nature was the pole-star, the guiding force that guided evolution. In a blink of evolutionary time imagined abstractions, morphing into culture, took center stage and pushed Mother Nature off her throne. An imagined judging and vindictive God in the sky rapped Mother Nature in a violent grab for control and he has not stopped, not for a second.

Over these 50,000 years ‘belonging to what,’ which is the core issue, dissolved from identifying with nature and natural processes to increasingly abstract and therefore disembodied imagined concepts. Stories and myths became reified as iconic beliefs; racism, religions, patriotic nationalism, pledges of allegiance, and endless conflicts between images, between beliefs, plunder and wars. There grew a reciprocal dynamic between our interior self-image and the external culture which, on close examination, are mirrors of the other. Belonging defines identity. The primal need to belong became a powerful tool used by culture to maintain and grow its disembodied self, at the expense of our true human design and purpose.

To belong to a counterfeit, we must sacrifice our true potential in exchange for the hoped for security culture promises. The ‘rub,’ or knife hidden in the bargain, is that culture uses comparison, judgement, punishments and rewards, all threatening strategies, to maintain our allegiance. Rather than delivering the promised security, we end up feeling constantly observed, compared, graded and threatened in a vain attempt to reaffirm that we belong, a perennial process that carves our inner identity, how we experience, define ourselves and relate to others, including the environment. All this, inwardly and outwardly, represents an endless betrayal of the primal need to belong, originally to nature, coopted and captured by human imagination which is often less than sane, less than true. In a word, often mad as a hatter. With our lack of knowing thy self, we lose track of what we are doing, then imagine the phantoms that we create are “real,” like Don Quixote’s windmills.

We don’t really understand the nature of our thought process; we’re not aware of how it works and how it's really disrupting, not only our society and our individual lives but also the way the brain and nervous system operate, making us unhealthy or perhaps even someway damaging the system. I am suggesting that the very means by which we try to solve our problems is the problem. The source of our problems is within the structure of thought itself.

Betrayed by culture, we misuse our capacity to imagine fighting the mental images we create, not realizing that we created them. And by so doing we waste our true capacity serving and protecting our true nature which is nature. And this defining reciprocal-cycle of betrayal is repeated generation after generation, compounding our miss-attunement with ourselves and the universal forces of nature, a betrayal which now has become so acute that all of us, and everything else, is sliding down a very slippery slope into the sixth mass extinction. Without belonging the child cannot survive. Belong to a betrayed model and nothing can survive.

“Great,” you shout, sliding faster and faster, “What a fine mess you have left us with.” The mass and gravity of this rolling snowball may be too much to stop. We really don't know. But it looks pretty bad. Clearly, culture is incapable of saving us. There is no security to be found there. On the contrary. The original bargain was a hoax, played on us so early and at such a deep primal levels, before we have the capacity to even conceive of such a swindle, that we all find ourselves trapped in the belonging culture-identity cycle before we learn to talk and talk. So early that the belonging culture-identity cycle became our reality. Culture is the only reality we “know,” and everyone else is, more or less, trapped in, and identified with, the same flawed and destructive reality. And the system, culture, to preserve its own skin, does everything possible to have us believe that its reality is the only one. Anything else is crazy.
The enchanting nature of our explosive capacity to imagine is so powerful that very few ever become aware of what they are doing. They live, more or less pre-defined, mediocre lives enclosed in a mirrored bubble that only reflects itself, filtering out all other possibilities. And those who do manage to peek through the reflections and see..., well, they are cast as nuts or superstitious villains to be dismissed or properly burned at the stake – branding such silliness once-and-for-all, thereby preventing others from ever considering the same capital offense. Ah, screwed if you do and screwed if you don’t! That is how the game is played. Realizing this – what are you to do?

Like a bored bear pacing back and forth in the zoo, those unaware of being in prison spend their pre-programed days rearranging their prison cells. The rare few that do realize they are in prison spend their days planning their escape. Escape from what, you ask? After all, we are reincarnating the prison, moment by moment, by not being aware of what we are doing. We are the prison and we are the guards who prevent our escape. The simple truth is; each of us must escape from ourselves. Clearly, no one can do this for us. We are on our own, completely. Nor can culture, the known, provide an effective escape route. The mental state that created culture and its twin, our personal-social identity, is the source we must escape from. The practice of mindfulness, being completely aware and focused on the present moment, opens the door. A problem can’t be solved at the level of the problem. Complete attention precludes one’s conditioning.

The grand paradox is: everything we know is part of culture and culture shapes our identification with that culture. Like one of those Chinese finger puzzles, the more we use culture to become free from culture, the tighter culture’s grip becomes. Escaping from the prison we create for ourselves is not as easy as it looks. There is an answer, however, it’s not what you think. The quality of one’s attention is the difference that makes the difference. Attention is not a concept, not part of culture, not part of the system that creates the problem. Here is your key.
Inviting the Miraculous
On Education Part One

Assumptions regarding education are like coke-bottle glasses, thick and dense. How is it possible that an industrial-revolution structure remains appropriate for a post-technological global-brain where the mobile computer in your pocket has twice or five-times the computing power of the human brain, which is not far off? And yet, we still believe children in mass should be ferried to local knowledge incubators for six to seven hours a day, one hundred eighty days each year, and be inoculated with one to three homework assignments per week, taking fifteen to twenty minutes each, first through third grade - two to four assignments per week, lasting between fifteen and forty-five minutes each in fourth through sixth grade. Daft!

The primacy of knowledge is shrinking. Buckminster Fuller, 1895-1983, noticed that until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today nanotechnology knowledge is doubling every two years and clinical knowledge every 18 months. On average human knowledge is doubling every 13 months. According to IBM, the “Internet of Things” will lead to the doubling of knowledge every 12 hours. Simply put, The Internet of Things is the concept of connecting any device with an on and off switch to the Internet (and/or to each other). This includes everything from cellphones, coffee makers, washing machines, headphones, lamps, wearable devices and almost anything else you can think of. By 2020 there will be over 26 billion connected devices... That’s a lot of connections (some even estimate this number to be much higher, over 100 billion). 2020 is two months away. What does this say about our outdated and reflexive assumptions about schooling? Impossible!

Joseph Chilton Pearce was fond of quoting a Carnegie study. In 1963 that study found only 5% of what we learn lifelong is acquired through formal instruction, training and schooling. And of that 5% we retain only 3% to 5% for any length of time. American kids will spend 943 hours in elementary school this year, that’s 12,259 hours K-12. Of that only 612 hours will be functionally remembered (5%), about two-thirds of the time invested in one year, not thirteen years. What is going on the remaining 95% (11,647 hours)? And this does not include the time needed to get ready and travel to and from school each day or the time invested in so called homework. What is wrong with this picture especially considering that the future looks very different than it did in 1963?

John Taylor Gatto, famous for the term Dumbing Us Down, his definition of compulsory schooling, shared that the form and structure of compulsory schooling was designed for social conditioning and obedience training, at the expense of optimum individual development, not to encourage it. The phrase that best summarizes this is ‘form is content.’ The form of a structure is the primary content being learned, something most evident in the early years.

Total expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States in 2015–16 amounted to $706 billion, or $13,847 per public school student enrolled in the fall (in constant 2017–18 dollars) which include salaries, employee benefits, purchased services, tuition, and supplies – of which, according to the Carnegie study, 95% is wasted, or, is being invested to achieve goals other than optimizing individual learning and performance, i.e., social conditioning and obedience training for parents and children. From a social conditioning and obedience training perspective the system is working perfectly. But, social conditioning and obedience training to what? Civilization as culture.

But, what if this massive experiment in social conditioning and obedience training is hitched to the wrong wagon? What if civilization and culture, as fostered by education and psychology as we know it, is fatally flawed, even suicidal?
The societies where [education and] psychology has its deepest roots are those that have promoted the devastation of biocultural diversity around the world and led us to the brink of planetary disaster (Amel, Manning, Scott, & Koger, 2017; Steffens et al., 2018; Trout, Stockman, Rubinstein, & Maiorana, 2019; Turner, 1994). Yet, the institutions of contemporary [education and] psychology do not systematically critique these societies or their institutions; rather, they instead help citizens to “adjust” to a life-destroying culture (Kidner, 2001).

The contrast between civilized and indigenous (first nation) peoples the world over could not be starker. First nation peoples perceive themselves as part of the fabric of life, always situated relationally, dynamically in relation to the natural world; they have small egos but large selves (Descola, 2013; Ingold, 2005; Redfield, 1956). SBHG (small band hunter gathers) and similar societies show a great deal of extra-human awareness and interconnection, showing expanded capacities to take the perspectives of local animals and other-than-animal life (plants, rivers, mountains). This multiperspectivalism is fostered in the communities by local story and practices like trances through dancing and singing. Entrancement allows for receptive attunement to life energies in the vicinity, often as a means to promote balance and flourishing within the biocommunity but also to remind the humans that they are part of the circle of life, not separate or superior (Descola, 2013; Katz, Biesele, & St. Denis, 1997; Kohn, 2013; Mann, 2016; Shepard, 1998).

Implicitly, schooling as conditioning is an identification with culture, a means to fit in. Mass education and mass media are THE ways this is done. The game changing insight is that now identification with culture may be suicidal (note the sixth-great extinction under full swing). If culture is toxic and the meaning of knowledge, as it is now understood, is shaped by the context culture represents – what is purpose and meaning of education? How does the model-experience we call education prepare the next generation of young people to not only cope, but flourish joyfully as human beings in a future overflowing with instability?

Existing knowledge cannot meet this challenge. Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach... Our culture prides itself on thought being its highest achievement... Thought is very powerful, and has created many good things, but if we don't notice how it works, it can become very destructive, as with the present danger of nuclear war, pollution and mass destruction of natural resources. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the structure of thought and knowledge, to see what the problems are and to explore the question of insight, which is required to bring knowledge to order.

David Bohm
Theoretical Physicist

Civilization as culture and what we experience as ‘self’ are expressions of thought as Bohm describes. This field or force; thought as knowledge-self-culture-civilization has indoctrinated all of us into believing that thought, and now technology, is the high road to salvation. The impending likelihood of the sixth-great extinction fully blossoming challenges this assumption.

Implied in this challenge is a radical reevaluation of what it means to be a human being, perhaps one of the last editions as we might know, and this of course redefines, and urgently, both the purpose and meaning of what we call education.

Years ago in Earth in Mind, David W. Orr, the Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics at Oberlin College and a James Marsh Professor at the University of Vermont, observed that most of the great personal and global challenges we face have been created by highly educated people. David argues, “it is not more education that we need, but a particular kind of education.” David Bohm points to insight as a force that brings thought and knowledge to order. Darcia Narvaez and David Witherington hint at extra-human awareness and interconnection, showing
expanded capacities as a means to promote balance and flourishing within the biocommunity and also to remind humans that they are part of the circle of life, not separate or superior.

What does a model and structure of education that brings this about look and feel like and is that even possible using the industrial-revolution model, the form and structure we call compulsory mass schooling or even schooling at all? Wow. Now, that’s a big idea. See the writings of John Holt, an American author and educator, proponent of homeschooling and, specifically, the unschooling approach, and a pioneer in youth rights theory. In a world that is changing as fast as our, less form, less formal structure, expands dramatically the potential content implied. In this expanded view of content, I include what is generally categorized as the miraculous.

If 95% of lifelong learning is not acquired through formal instruction, training or schooling, what would a model, form and structure look like that is grounded in that 95% rather than the paltry 5% we currently accept and pay billions for? And how could individual children and families engage fully in that 95% model, form and structure in ways that prepares them all to flourish in an era of deepening global and environmental challenges? In a word authentic play. Play? How can play be taken as seriously as formal education? Ridiculous! Or is it? I asked Joseph Chilton Pearce about the relationship between play and learning.

J: They are certainly interdependent. You can’t have real learning with a child unless they are playing. Real playing is how real learning takes place. You can have conditioning and a Pavlovian conditioning of his dogs, or behaviors modifications through other means which we look on as very serious, and we generally call learning, but it’s not learning. It’s conditioning.

Real learning takes place by what Maria Montessori would call the absorbent mind of the child. Simply absorbing their universe, absorbing it, becoming it, and they do this through play. Play can be the most serious undertaking of a child’s life. They are completely entrained in play. The three parts of the mind; thought, feeling, action, and the body, every aspect of the child’s self is entrained, focuses totally on the activity of absorbing their world. Absorbing their environment. This is the most serious activity in their life because they’re literally building their construction of knowledge of the world, of themselves, of the relationship between the two and laying down all the foundations for the later forms of intelligence. And in all of that, play is the activity itself. So you have those two things. What we think of as learning is conditioning, training, but real learning is that state of play. We have to interrupt the child’s real state of learning or play in order to bring about what we think should be their training and their conditioning.

So we make this profound error of looking on education, schooling, and all those things as dramatically separate from play. Whereas in actuality, all we’re doing in our activity is conditioning or some forms of behavior modification which inhibit the child’s ability to open to and absorb the universe within them.

We have to remember that schools are set up for conditioning. There are certain aspects of the child we want to train to respond in certain ways through schooling. This is all part of conditioning, behavior modifications. In each case we must interrupt the child’s real learning process of play in order to bring about these conditionings which we think they should have.

I think this is one of the reasons we find a very small percentage of retention of the conditioning we think we’re giving our children. I remember the Carnegie Institute’s famous statement back in 63, that children seem to retain only 3-5 percent of the total information or conditioning modifications we’re trying to bring about in school. About 3-5% retention, whereas the learning that occurs in the state of play is literally built in as a permanent neural-patterning in the brain which they never loose. If we could just recognize the direct correspondence between play and learning and the dramatic difference between that and conditioning and by simply shifting over, I think our entire schooling can be extremely
successful and produce say 95% retention. But it would have to be within the frame by which
nature has set up the learning process, which is play.

Joseph Chilton Pearce
with Michael Mendizza

Play for a three-year-old looks and feels very different than play for a seven or twelve-year-old.
That means real learning looks just as different. Individual learning styles and what is actually
worth playing with, what is intrinsically interesting or challenging, will change dramatically
between children, even at the same age and stage. How can a mass-curriculum meet this? The
answer is obvious. It can’t. To meet this play-based model of optimum learning lifelong, the
environment must be constantly changing to meet the innate wonder, curiosity, intrinsic
motivation and capacity of each child. This demands attention, care and creativity on the part of
adults, and yes, that means individual parents. And it assumes that the adult model models, in
practical ways, the new capacities we so desperately need. Ah, here we meet the real elephant
in the room. Parents are not interested. They, like our children, have been deeply conditioned to
believe that they are incompetent, are too busy, and often simply don’t want to or can’t the way
society is organized, invest the care and attention needed to meet this challenge. It is much
easier to turn this responsibility over to government trained clerks, to use John Taylor Gatto’s
term.

But the culture implicit in this conditioning and obedience training is, or may soon be, suicidal.
Form is content. We need a form that replaces our current content model of education that is
not implicitly destructive. And to discover or evolve this healthy, life affirming form, we must
negate the core assumptions upon which the current model was designed and built. We need to
shake ourselves awake from the spell that thought as knowledge-civilization-culture-self has
woven.

Waking up from our deep-state of conditioning implies, does it not, experiencing a completely
new state. Rather than rushing to fit into or trying to fix a toxic, perhaps suicidal culture, we look
with fresh eyes at those capacities that will serve and enhance our children’s capacity to adapt
and flourish in an increasingly hostile and complex world.

As Bohm describes; existing thought as knowledge cannot meet this challenge. Something much
deeper is needed, a completely new approach. It is not more education that we need, but a
particular kind of education, a form that is grounded in insight along with extra-human
awareness and interconnection, showing expanded capacities as a means to promote balance
and flourishing within the biocommunity.

As stewards of this emerging new generation our present challenge is to create experiences that
draw out of our children these capacities. This opening and expanding of new and perhaps even
undreamed of capacities replaces ‘content’ as the foundation, meaning and purpose of what we
used to call education. Actually, we drop that outdated word all together. Positive, adaptive and
environmentally-holistically and appropriate learning rests at the center of the cyclone.

Yes, our children need to be fluent in language and symbolic reasoning, what the ‘liberal arts
foundation’ is intended to provide. But this experience-based, extra-human awareness and
interconnection model reaches beyond even unschooling in its scope and the challenge it
represents. Of course it is easier to hand our kids off to government certified clerks.

Yes, what we call climate change and the global cesspool of environmental toxins we are all
marinating in implies hostile and life-challenging global events. From the existing paradigm
these changes are catastrophic, life threatening and depressing, depression being nature’s way to
suppress the immune system at a time when a robust immune response, creative optimism, is
most needed. But, perhaps, there is another paradigm. How on earth can we and our children
be creatively optimistic about possible extinction? Stay tuned. mm
Why go to school? What is the meaning of education?

On Education Part Two

If today is a typical day on planet Earth, we will lose 116 square miles of rainforest, or about an acre a second. We will lose another 72 square miles to encroaching deserts, as a result of human mismanagement and overpopulation. We will lose 40 to 100 species, and no one knows whether the number is 40 or 100. Today the human population will increase by 250,000. And today we will add 2,700 tons of chlorofluorocarbons to the atmosphere and 15 million tons of carbon. Tonight the Earth will be a little hotter, its waters more acidic, and the fabric of life more threadbare.

The truth is that many things on which your future health and prosperity depend are in dire jeopardy: climate stability, the resilience and productivity of natural systems, the beauty of the natural world, and biological diversity.

It is worth noting that this is not the work of ignorant people. It is, rather, largely the result of work by people with BAs, BSs, LLBs, MBAs, and PhDs. Elie Wiesel made a similar point to the Global Forum in Moscow last winter when he said that the designers and perpetrators of the Holocaust were the heirs of Kant and Goethe. In most respects the Germans were the best educated people on Earth, but their education did not serve as an adequate barrier to barbarity. What was wrong with their education? In Wiesel's words: "It emphasized theories instead of values, concepts rather than human beings, abstraction rather than consciousness, answers instead of questions, ideology and efficiency rather than conscience."

The same could be said of the way our education has prepared us to think about the natural world. It is a matter of no small consequence that the only people who have lived sustainably on the planet for any length of time could not read, or, like the Amish, do not make a fetish of reading. My point is simply that education is no guarantee of decency, prudence, or wisdom. More of the same kind of education will only compound our problems. This is not an argument for ignorance, but rather a statement that the worth of education must now be measured against the standards of decency and human survival - the issues now looming so large before us in the decade of the 1990s and beyond. It is not education that will save us, but education [and by implication parenting] of a certain kind.

David Orr
The Learning Revolution, 1991

This Matter of Culture

Why do we go to school, why do we learn various subjects, why do we pass examinations and compete with each other for better grades? What does this so-called education mean, and what is it all about? This is really a very important question, not only for the students, but also for the parents, for the teachers, and for everyone who loves this earth. Why do we go through the struggle to be educated? Is it merely in order to pass some examinations and get a job? Or is it the function of education to prepare us while we are young to understand the whole process of life? Having a job and earning one’s livelihood is necessary – but is that all? Are we being educated only for that? Surely, life is not merely a job, an occupation; life is something extraordinarily wide and profound, it is a great mystery, a vast realm in which we function as human beings. If we merely prepare ourselves to earn a livelihood, we shall miss the whole point of life; and to understand life is much more important than merely to prepare for examinations and become very proficient in mathematics, physics, or what you will.

So, whether we are teachers or students, is it not important to ask ourselves why we are educating or being educated? And what does life mean? Is not life an extraordinary thing? The birds, the flowers, the flourishing trees, the heavens, the stars, the rivers and the fish therein – all this is life. Life is the poor and the rich; life is the constant battle between groups, races and nations; life is meditation; life is what we call religion, and it is also the subtle, hidden things of the mind – the envies, the ambitions, the passions, the fears, fulfilments and anxieties.
All this and much more is life. But we generally prepare ourselves to understand only one small corner of it. We pass certain examinations, find a job, get married, have children, and then become more and more like machines. We remain fearful, anxious, frightened of life. So, is it the function of education to help us understand the whole process of life, or is it merely to prepare us for a vocation, for the best job we can get?...

Surely, education has no meaning unless it helps you to understand the vast expanse of life with all its subtleties, with its extraordinary beauty, its sorrows and joys. You may earn degrees, you may have a series of letters after your name and land a very good job; but then what? What is the point of it all if in the process your mind becomes dull, weary, stupid? So, while you are young, must you not seek to find out what life is all about? And is it not the true function of education to cultivate in you the intelligence which will try to find the answer to all these problems? Do you know what intelligence is? It is the capacity, surely, to think freely without fear, without a formula, so that you begin to discover for yourself what is real, what is true; but if you are frightened you will never be intelligent. Any form of ambition, spiritual or mundane, breeds anxiety, fear; therefore, ambition does not help to bring about a mind that is clear, simple, direct, and hence intelligent.

You know, it is really very important while you are young to live in an environment in which there is no fear. Most of us, as we grow older, become frightened; we are afraid of living, afraid of losing a job, afraid of tradition, afraid of what the neighbours, or what the wife or husband would say, afraid of death. Most of us have fear in one form or another; and where there is fear there is no intelligence. And is it not possible for all of us, while we are young, to be in an environment where there is no fear but rather an atmosphere of freedom – freedom, not just to do what we like, but to understand the whole process of living? Life is really very beautiful, it is not this ugly thing that we have made of it; and you can appreciate its richness, its depth, its extraordinary loveliness only when you revolt against everything – against organized religion, against tradition, against the present rotten society – so that you as a human being find out for yourself what is true. Not to imitate but to discover – that is education, is it not? It is very easy to conform to what your society or your parents and teachers tell you. That is a safe and easy way of existing; but that is not living, because in it there is fear, decay, death. To live is to find out for yourself what is true, and you can do this only when there is freedom, when there is continuous revolution inwardly, within yourself.

But you are not encouraged to do this; no one tells you to question, to find out for yourself what God is, because if you were to rebel you would become a danger to all that is false. Your parents and society want you to live safely, and you also want to live safely. Living safely generally means living in imitation and therefore in fear. Surely, the function of education is to help each one of us to live freely and without fear, is it not? And to create an atmosphere in which there is no fear requires a great deal of thinking on your part as well as on the part of the teacher, the educator.

Do you know what this means – what an extraordinary thing it would be to create an atmosphere in which there is no fear? And we must create it, because we see that the world is caught up in endless wars; it is guided by politicians who are always seeking power; it is a world of lawyers, policemen and soldiers, of ambitious men and women all wanting position and all fighting each other to get it. Then there are the so-called saints, the religious gurus with their followers; they also want power, position, here or in the next life. It is a mad world, completely confused, in which the communist is fighting the capitalist, the socialist is resisting both, and everybody is against somebody, struggling to arrive at a safe place, a position of power or comfort. The world is torn by conflicting beliefs, by caste and class distinctions, by separative nationalities, by every form of stupidity and cruelty – and this is the world you are being educated to fit into. You are encouraged to fit into the framework of this disastrous society; your parents want you to do that, and you also want to fit in.

Now, is it the function of education merely to help you to conform to the pattern of this rotten social order, or is it to give you freedom – complete freedom to grow and create a different society, a new world?
We want to have this freedom, not in the future, but now, otherwise we may all be destroyed. We must create immediately an atmosphere of freedom so that you can live and find out for yourselves what is true, so that you become intelligent, so that you are able to face the world and understand it, not just conform to it, so that inwardly, deeply, psychologically you are in constant revolt. Because it is only those who are in constant revolt that discover what is true, not the man who conforms, who follows some tradition. It is only when you are constantly inquiring, constantly observing, constantly learning, that you find truth, God, or love; and you cannot inquire, observe, learn, you cannot be deeply aware, if you are afraid. So the function of education, surely, is to eradicate, inwardly as well as outwardly, this fear that destroys human thought, human relationship and love.

J. Krishnamurti
This Matter of Culture, 1964

Creating an atmosphere in which there is no fear requires a great deal of thinking on everyone’s part; the child, student, parent and educator. No fear physically is fairly obvious; no bullying, no corporal punishments, no spanking, no isolation as in time out, etc. No fear psychologically is another matter; no comparison, which includes grades, no rewards, which include praise and threats of punishment, no humiliation, no shame, no ‘I told you so,’ no, ‘how many times do I have to tell you,’ no, ‘look what you did, or did not do.’ In all these, and many other ways, culture implants deeply and very early, the seeds of our psychological mask, our coping pattern, our self-image or ego. First things first. When the milk spills attention is focused on the milk, not who tipped it over. Below, Chris Mercogliano explores where we go from there. As you will discover, Chris is describing the atmosphere for optimum learning and performance lifelong, one’s relationship with others and the environment, not content or curriculum.

This optimum learning atmosphere Chris describes, stands in contrast with our deeply held assumptions regarding education. How is it possible that an industrial-revolution structure remains appropriate for a post-technological global-brain where the mobile computer in your pocket has twice or five-times the computing power of the human brain, which is not far off? And yet, we still believe children in mass should be ferried to local knowledge incubators for six to seven hours a day, one hundred eighty days each year, and be inoculated with one to three homework assignments per week, taking fifteen to twenty minutes each, first through third grade - two to four assignments per week, lasting between fifteen and forty-five minutes each in fourth through sixth grade.

The primacy of knowledge is shrinking and with it the primacy of content as the focus and goal of education. Buckminster Fuller, 1895-1983, noticed that until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. Today nanotechnology knowledge is doubling every two years and clinical knowledge every 18 months. On average human knowledge is doubling every 13 months. According to IBM, the “Internet of Things” will lead to the doubling of knowledge every 12 hours. Simply put, The Internet of Things is the concept of connecting any device with an on and off switch to the Internet (and/or to each other). This includes everything from cellphones, coffee makers, washing machines, headphones, lamps, wearable devices and almost anything else you can think of. By 2020 there will be over 26 billion connected devices... That's a lot of connections (some even estimate this number to be much higher, over 100 billion). 2020 is two months away. What does this say about our outdated assumptions about schooling? Increasingly individual parents are waking up. What we call schooling is part of a much larger system, a system designed to benefit the system, not the individual.

School as a Living Organism
It may sound strange coming from someone who has spent all his working life teaching in and helping start schools, but I have always been ambivalent toward their existence, even ones I think are pretty good places for kids. Why do I feel this way? Because most schools are:

- Artificial environments where children tend to learn about life second-hand.
- Rich in information and materials, but poor in organic experience filled with meaning and purpose.
• Increasingly isolated in these days of heightened school security that keeps others out and budget cuts that keep students in, placing yet another barrier between children and real-world sources of deep and permanent learning.

• Following a standardized template that has little connection to local conditions, which makes no sense in a nation as geographically and culturally diverse as ours.

Even autonomous schools with unique and flexible approaches have to continually resist the gravitational pull toward taking on the characteristics of institutions by adopting routines and protocols aimed at meeting the mechanical needs of the institution, not the human needs of the participants. It’s no coincidence that the two examples Webster’s gives for “institutional” refer to food and a certain shade of green, the obvious inference being that the term means bland and drab. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, everything about a child’s makeup abhors blandness and drabness because excitement, wonder, and challenge are the natural drivers of development.

Another life-diminishing aspect of institutions is that identity inside of them is based on roles, on what one does and not who one is. In schools, the one-dimensional focus on intellectual performance suppresses the cultivation of relationships that reach deeper, more personal levels. The resulting superficiality discourages the kind of intimacy that is another of development’s core ingredients.

In an earlier essay I argued that in order for schools to avoid becoming artificial, isolated, institutional places that neglect children’s developmental needs, they have to behave like true communities. Here I will propose a second necessary condition: They must function like a living organism.

Allow me to flesh out the metaphor in some detail. First and foremost, a school needs a metabolism to generate the energy required for teaching and learning. In order to metabolize a plentiful supply, a school has to act in a manner similar to what science calls an “open system,” meaning that it continually exchanges matter, energy, and information with its environment.

Unlike closed systems, which exist in isolation and are controlled by external instructions that predetermine their behavior—machines, for example—open systems have the internal capacity to direct themselves and to change in novel ways. Put more simply, closed systems continue to follow their instructions automatically regardless of what’s going on around them, while open systems are sensitively attuned to their surroundings and can change spontaneously as conditions change.

Thus change is a key element of metabolism, which comes from the Greek word for change. In order to help children gain the abilities and the knowledge they need to live fruitfully in the world, a school has to continually adapt what it does and how it does it to the constantly changing conditions in that world. This is something conventional schools, which are classic examples of closed systems, woefully fail to do because they are mandated from above to rigidly adhere to an educational model that was cobbled together over 150 years ago. At the time, the Industrial Revolution was at its peak and there was a high demand for schools to produce people who followed directions well and were willing to perform dull, repetitious acts for an external reward. The end result was a system of schools that continue to operate very much like factories, with efficiency and uniformity as their primary operating principles.

Tradition and strong social institutions such as family and religion also existed then to guide young people through the transition into adult life. But today’s wide open world calls for a very different skill set. Successfully navigating adulthood now depends on flexible, independent thinking and inner sources of motivation and guidance, and yet conventional schools still cling to the same anachronistic model that does little to develop these tools.

A school-as-a-living-organism approach will ground itself in recent research that demonstrates children’s ability to orchestrate their own development. Because the process is driven by a child’s inherent desire to seek out the challenges that lead to an understanding and mastery of the world, education becomes far more a matter of self-directed exploration, discovery, and trial-and-error problem solving than teacher-directed instruction.
Entrusting students with the responsibility for their own education helps them learn to make good choices and leads to the secure sense of purpose and reliable inner compass they will need to become engaged, autonomous adults.

A school-as-a-living-organism will change in response to internal conditions too. It will maintain a fluid, flexible structure so that it can alter its approach to fit the ever-changing needs and aspirations of its child and adult participants. One of the fundamental reasons conventional education is so lifeless is because it is based on the old-paradigm view of learning as a mechanical process in which all children engage in exactly the same way and at exactly the same time. The end result was a rigid educational model steeped in conformity and standardization, one that insists students adjust to it and not the other way around.

The reason living organisms can share matter, energy, and information with their environment is because the cells that comprise them are surrounded by a semi-permeable membrane that allows for constant exchange with the outside world, while at the same time filtering out harmful toxins. And so it should be with schools. In order to stay vibrant and relevant, they need to welcome in parents, artists, writers, scientists, activists, and community leaders to share their knowledge and experience with students—on a routine basis and not just a token few times a year as is presently the case. At the same time, students should be encouraged to explore learning opportunities out in the marketplace as soon as they are mature enough, shadowing and working as interns and apprentices alongside professionals who can provide valuable modeling and mentoring.

All too often today young people are led to believe that the adult world is dangerous and foreboding, and that there is no place for them. And yet once they graduate from high school or college we expect them to find their own way into adulthood. One obvious solution to this potentially paralyzing bind is to grant them access to the adult world throughout adolescence, so that when the time comes to make the transition they already have enough experience to enable them to take their first grown up steps with confidence and a sense of direction. The fact that the adult world isn’t dangerous doesn’t mean there aren’t toxic influences from which children need to be shielded. A school-as-a-living-organism will recognize how susceptible kids can be to manipulation and will filter out things like corporate advertising, junk food, military recruiting, and indoctrination in all of its many forms.

ANOTHER ESSENTIAL COMPONENT of a metabolism is respiration, whereby the oxygen needed to catalyze energy production is transferred from the outside air to the cells inside. In a school-as-a-living-organism, the enthusiasm of the students and the teachers serves as the oxygen. Because their schools foster exploration, creativity, collaboration, and self-expression, students will naturally transport enthusiasm into the classroom. They’ll come to school eager to learn, knowing that the activities will be novel and meaningful and that they will enjoy a genuine sense of connection to each other and their teachers.

Conversely, the scripted, prepackaged curriculum that is the mainstay of conventional education is enthusiasm’s archenemy. So are grades, competition, and other forms of extrinsic motivation, which recent research shows, actually suppress learning. Children are born with a powerful inner drive to learn, and introducing outside rewards only interferes with a process that evolution has been steadily fine tuning for millions of years.

As psychologist Carol Dweck discovered in her groundbreaking research on motivation, the students who urged themselves on with their own desire to tackle challenging learning tasks consistently outperformed those who were driven by parental expectations and approval, even when the latter had greater previous ability. The bottom line is that when there is a sufficient supply of enthusiasm in the classroom atmosphere, the reliance upon extrinsic motivators is utterly unnecessary. You might say that learning is as automatic as breathing in a school-as-a-living organism because its entire approach is centered on the knowledge that development at the individual level and evolution at the species level is essentially a grand learning process, and that children’s own curiosity and hunger for challenge will supply all of the necessary impetus.
As for teachers, they will naturally teach with enthusiasm when they get to be themselves, share what’s exciting to them, form individual relationships with their students, and collaborate with the other teachers. It is noteworthy that the verbs “respire” and “inspire” both come from the Latin root spiritus, meaning “breath.” To inspire, in turn, means “to exert an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on.” This should be the highest aim of teaching, and a school-as-a-living-organism will encourage its teachers to develop themselves as people and as professionals on an ongoing basis so that they can continue to serve as sources of inspiration.

A third important component of metabolism is digestion, which is what enables an organism to convert food into energy. Here I will temporarily step away from the metaphor in order to emphasize the literal role of food in the learning process. Although the brain accounts for only 2% of a person’s total weight, the body allocates as much as 25% of its energy to meet the brain’s needs. Moreover, children’s developing brains are acutely sensitive to nutritional deficiencies and won’t fully develop unless they receive an adequate supply of key nutrients. A school-as-a-living-organism will therefore pay close attention to children’s diets. If there are children who don’t get a complete meal before school, the school will serve a breakfast that includes whole grains and fresh fruit. The same goes for lunch, which must also be a balanced meal rich in natural vitamins and minerals.

A school-as-a-living-organism will also make educating children about food a priority, especially by finding ways to involve them in the process. Students will have the opportunity to help with food preparation, and wherever possible with growing some of the things that the school consumes. There will also be field trips to places like farms, dairies, and bakeries so that children have a direct experience of where their food comes from. Moreover, all instruction about nutrition and the relationship between diet and health will be done in contextual ways that bring the information to life.

Mealtimes in a school-as-a-living-organism will be social occasions—with students and teachers eating together in the same room—that help to foster a sense of community. As families disintegrate or grow more geographically distant, as people become increasingly transient, as urban neighborhoods are fractured by suburban flight, as electronic communication removes the intimacy from interpersonal communication, and as face-to-face transactions disappear from the marketplace, too many of us are “bowling alone” these days according to political scientist Robert Putnam in his book by that title.

This rising individualism in American society, says social psychologist Jean Twenge in Generation Me, is accompanied by a disturbing increase in narcissism, which she and a team of researchers have been measuring with an annual nationwide survey of college students. The results, which form what is known as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, indicate that narcissism levels doubled between 1982 and 2006. A school-as-a-living-organism will also use food in celebratory ways, by marking important ethnic holidays with the preparation and sharing of special foods embedded in the cultural traditions of the students and the teachers.

NERVOUS SYSTEMS HAVE a fourfold purpose: to monitor and interpret environmental signals, serve as an internal communication network that enables an organism to coordinate the best possible response, synchronize the functioning of internal organs; and then our human nervous system, thanks to the evolution of the prefrontal cortex, has the apparently unique capacity to maintain a conscious awareness of our thoughts and emotions—our inner environment, as it were.

Life scientists operating out of the old Newtonian paradigm constructed a hierarchical model of our nervous system. The idea was that it passes sensory information “up” to a highly centralized control center in the brain’s frontal lobe that analyzes the data, decides on the most advantageous reaction, and then issues commands back “down” to the appropriate muscles. A good analogy is the modern corporation, with the frontal lobe as the chief executive officer. Most individual schools and all school systems are organized in the same top-down fashion, with a growing number of districts even calling their superintendents CEOs.
Neuroscientists now know, however, that the human organism’s internal communication and decision making processes are highly decentralized, and that the distribution of control can be quite horizontal. As Nobel Prize laureate Gerald Edelman explains, the brain is somewhat of a paradox: Each brain area is functionally segregated and yet no one area alone controls the rest. The necessary coordination is the result of a complex set of hormonal and electromagnetic feedback loops in which the frontal lobe is a highly influential partner, but not the chief executive it was once thought to be.

Then there is the discovery by neuroscientist Candace Pert that the same receptors found on nerve cell membranes are present on most, if not all, of the rest of the body’s cells. This means that our internal communication network extends beyond the nervous system, thanks to these ubiquitous transmitters that Pert calls “molecules of emotion.”

A school-as-a-living-organism will likewise have a widely distributed means of monitoring conditions in the outside world, facilitating internal communication, synchronizing the goings on in different parts of the school, and maintaining a conscious awareness of how well the school is working. Its “nervous system” will be made up of the highly interactive web of relationships between all of the participants, with students and their families, teachers, support staff, and administrators all serving as signal molecules providing the feedback needed to sustain the school’s well-being.

To facilitate nervous system activity, a school-as-a-living-organism will hold a weekly policy and planning forum during the school day in which students, teachers, and administrators are all encouraged to participate. This will give everyone a say in how the school operates, and it will place decision-making on a shared, horizontal basis. Accordingly, the leadership style of the administration will be collaborative, not top-down, and the administrator’s primary function will be to remain aware of the school as a whole and make sure that it stays true to its mission.

Ample and clear communication between school and home is highly important too, and so a school-as-a-living-organism will also regularly hold evening forums for parents. In addition, teachers will encourage parents to contact them whenever they have questions or concerns, or relevant information to share about their children.

It’s no accident that “communication” and “community” stem from the same Latin root: communis, meaning “shared by all.” Schools that are communities in which education is truly a shared endeavor will inherently be schools with well-functioning nervous systems.

YES, A SCHOOL MUST have a brain, an obvious requirement because of the enormous role the brain plays in the learning process. But at the center of a school-as-a-living-organism there will also be a strong, pulsating heart.

Metaphorically speaking, this means that schools should first and foremost be caring places. Or quoting the esteemed educational philosopher Nel Noddings from her book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, “The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring.” According to Noddings, this is because when teachers truly care about their students, the result is “spontaneous delight and happy growth.”

Noddings writes elsewhere that the highest aim of education in the best schools is happiness because, “Happy children growing in their understanding of what happiness is, will seize their educational opportunities with delight, and they will contribute to the happiness of others.”

For Noddings, who taught math for 17 years and raised 10 children before earning a PhD in educational philosophy, human relationships are happiness’ single most important ingredient. She views teaching as a “caring relation,” not a role; and she recommends that teachers spend more than a single year with their students because the other ingredients of happiness—friendship, commitment, love—all spring from a level of intimacy that takes time to establish. She also advocates for smaller schools, and for teachers to specialize less and teach more than one subject so that they can have more contact with fewer students.
A crucial but all-too-often-ignored dimension of caring in the helping professions, according to psychiatrist N. Michael Murphy, is self-care. It is only when teachers know how to nourish, replenish, and love themselves that they will be able to help students learn to do the same. Whereas self-care is rarely, if ever, a part of conventional teacher education—therefore most of our schools today suffer from what Noddings calls a “crisis of caring”—teachers and administrators in a school-as-a-living-organism will be encouraged to actively attend to their own well-being on a daily basis.

In a school-as-a-living-organism, children won’t have to play roles either. Rather than acting like “students” conforming to the performance expectations of others, as is the case in conventional schools, they will be people living their lives on their own terms—pursuing interests, seeking out challenges, and sharing themselves with others. They will get to bring their bodies, emotions, and spirits to school, not just the cognitive learning portions of their brains, and there will be ample opportunity for them to attend to their physical, emotional, and social needs as well as their cognitive ones. Above all, they will have permission to be themselves. If they’re exuberant, it will be okay to express that exuberance. If they are angry, they can get angry; and if need be, they can receive help with learning to express their anger constructively. If a personal issue is troubling them, they can share it with others without fear of being judged and with the expectation of support in solving the problem.

When children’s selves and lives are encouraged to intertwine and overlap, it is inevitable, as psychiatrist M. Scott Peck explains, that “the conditions of others will become one’s own.” The end result is a community of caring in which it is safe to be oneself because no one is excluded for being different. Thus the “heart” in a school-as-a-living-organism will consist of all of the participants’ individual hearts linked together by mutual caring—an idea we now know is more than just a metaphor.

It turns out that the heart’s electromagnetic field, which is 1000 times stronger than the brain’s, projects up to ten feet beyond the body. This means that the hearts of individuals in close proximity are literally touching and affecting each other all the time. Noddings’ philosophical emphasis on caring and happiness is currently receiving biological confirmation too. According to recent research in neurocardiology, the heart is extremely sensitive to emotional states, which then heavily influence the quality of the powerful hormonal and electromagnetic signals that the heart broadcasts to the brain and the rest of the body.

For example, when we experience sustained positive emotions such as love, caring, and appreciation, our hearts induce in us an overall state of what scientists call “coherence,” meaning that all of our internal systems are operating in sync with one another. Of particular relevance to education is the fact that positive emotions enable the heart to foster the coherent alpha wave activity in the left hemisphere of the brain that makes learning possible. Conversely, negative emotions such as fear, stress, and anger disrupt the brain and impede children’s ability to learn.

A school-as-a-living-organism will pay careful attention to its heart because it knows a well-functioning one will enable the school to sustain the coherence that makes possible the complete development of each and every child. For the bottom line is this: The mission of school-as-a-living-organism is to nurture growth in all its myriad dimensions, not just left-brain academic skills. And in so doing it enables all children to reach their highest possible potential, which is their birthright.

Afterwards
Reflecting back over the 40 years since I first began teaching, what keeps coming to mind is the old French aphorism, “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.” Indeed, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same. The world has certainly changed to an almost unimaginable degree, but what about education? While the cry for change has at times been shrill and the rhetoric promising it ever bolder, has the situation really improved? If anything, the operating model of the overwhelming majority of schools, both public and private, only seems to have drifted farther from supporting real learning and growth. And the maddening truth remains that the children who succeed in these schools primarily belong to a privileged minority whose resources and experiences outside of school give them an advantage over the rest.
How much the fortunate ones actually learn in school, as opposed to learning it in the context of the rest of their lives and then demonstrating it in the classroom, would make for an interesting study indeed. Additional irony can be found in the ways in which conventional schools ultimately apply the recent research providing us with a much more accurate account of the learning process. For instance, neuroscientific advances in our understanding of brain function are bringing us a “brain-based” education that often ignores the paradigm-shifting realization that learning is a holistic game in which the brain is only one of the players. Focusing so narrowly on brain mechanics only perpetuates the old-paradigm reduction of education to a cognitive brain training exercise. It pays little heed to Gerald Edelman’s reminder that the brain is embedded in a body and the body is embedded in an environment; and it ultimately leaves children in the same old backside-numbing predicament: sitting at a desk passively absorbing skills and information in routine and out-of-context ways.

Another example is how certain reform-minded schools have translated the recent scientific confirmation of the fundamental role emotions play in the learning process into an “emotional intelligence curriculum,” whereby children are instructed in such subject matter as the visible cues of happiness, sadness, anger, and so on. Meanwhile, everything else going on in the classroom, well, remains the same. The educational process continues to leave how children feel—about themselves, their teachers, each other, what they’re doing, and the world around them—out of the equation. Thankfully however, something else has stayed the same too: There continue to be schools and families that operate by variations of an educational model that is very much attuned to how children learn and grow best. Many of these schools and homeschoolers began doing what they do well in advance of the research that now validates their approaches because they intuitively understood that education is a relational, experiential, and highly idiosyncratic process, and that children learn better when we trust them to direct their own education. Others have started more recently in response to the educational implications of the budding paradigm shift in science.

Is the growing number of people pursuing alternatives to the conventional model a sign of us heading toward a revolution in education? If only it were so; however, the reality is that education as an institution only mirrors the surrounding society. At the system level its principles and practices are determined by powerful political, social, and economic forces that are extremely adept at defending the status quo. And maybe this is “the way it spozed to be,” borrowing the title from the dissident teacher James Herndon’s 1968 chronicle of the one and only year he spent teaching in a segregated middle school in inner-city Los Angeles. As educational philosopher Maxine Greene pointed out in her book The Dialectic of Freedom, one of the reasons American culture is in such a shambles is that too many of us take our freedom for granted and view it as an entitlement or an inherited possession. Freedom has devolved into meaning an absence of interference, or the wherewithal to get ahead and get what we want as soon as we want it.

True freedom, according to Greene, is a quest and not a destination. It’s the capacity to take initiative. It involves risk and above all, the overcoming of freedom’s obstacles. But today’s culture is so distracting and anesthetizing that young people are no longer exposed to the kinds of situations in which they are likely “to choose themselves as committed and as free.” She continues: “They may have the liberty to buy books, to change jobs, to leave home; but they do not know what it is to reach out for freedom as a palpable good, to engage with and resist the compelling and conditioning forces, to open fields where the options can multiply, where unanticipated possibilities open each day.”

Inspired by the Greene’s words, I will part with the thought that perhaps a hidden and paradoxical purpose of the conventional educational model is to give us all something to struggle against—to spur parents to stop blindly turning their kids over to schools that don’t have their best interests at heart, teachers to take pause to consider their true purpose and how to achieve it, and children to seize the responsibility for their education. For there is no doubt that education can be a source of liberation for anyone determined to make it so.

Chris Mercogliano
A School Must Have a Heart, 2014
How do we model a state of being that will awaken and expand in this next, most threatened generation ever, the capacity to live a full, authentic, even miraculous human life, to break the destructive spell we call Western Civilization and rediscover who and what we really are – and by so doing tip the scales from death back to life?
Qualities, Capacities, Content and Curriculum
On Education Part Three

“Never memorize something that you can look up.” — Albert Einstein

Ask yourself: “If my child was one of the last living members of the human race, and he or she would carry the DNA memory that would give birth to a new species, what should that memory contain?” Perhaps DNA holds the memory of 2+2=4 or the Beatles recorded I want to hold your hand in October of 1963, but I doubt it. I place my memory bets on capacity and qualities, not content as data, information or knowledge. Qualities and capacity are those forces of behavior that define our relationships with others, nature and the universe; selfish greed and altruism, empathy and aggression, holistic appropriateness and inventiveness for profit, for example. When considering the value of parenting and education, rather than passing standardized tests and preparing for a job, we might consider qualities and capacities that will serve humanity in its new dawn, and then see that our child embodies these, just in case. Here are a few suggestions to get started:

- Affection
- Attention
- Appropriateness
- Authenticity
- Awe
- Balance
- Boldness
- Confidence
- Courage
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Decisiveness
- Distilled Imagination
- Embodied Presence
- Empathy
- Engagement
- Endurance
- Enthusiasm
- Freedom
- Goal-Oriented
- Humor
- Humility
- Inner Silence
- Inspiring
- Inquisitiveness
- Justice
- Kindness
- Knowledgeable
- Optimistic
- Order
- Patience
- Passion
- Playful
- Progressive
- Resilience
- Reliable
- Rebellious
- Sacred, A Relationship With
- Serenity
- Security
- Strength
- Supportive
- Understanding
- Trustworthy
- Unbiased
- Undistracted Listening/Observation
- Vitality
- Visionary
- Visualization
- Well Informed
- Wonder
- Wise
- Unbiased
- Undistracted Listening/Observation
- Vitality
- Visionary
- Visualization
- Well Informed
- Wonder
- Wisdom

When qualities and capacities are the target, content or curriculum become playthings or toys that elicit and develop positive life-enriching qualities. Who cares which toy works the magic? As you read the above list imagine experiences that would invite your child, or any child, to discover that quality or capacity. What would your relationship with that child feel like at that moment? How would you feel inside? How would you model the value of that quality as a living experience or as a response to a challenge? As I run through the list I hope that my presence would model and invite each one of these positive qualities in my child. Good job!
When we focus attention on content, which invariably becomes contest and comparison in our culture, we lose sight of the qualities and capacities that experience and knowledge elicit, which is the real purpose and meaning of nature’s agenda for learning and development, to relate in optimum ways with life, which is infinitely more complex and magical than culture. Culture focuses attention on content to mask its true, but hidden, agenda, which is, as John Taylor Gatto documented so well, conformity and obedience to authority. Sure, there are well meaning people in the system we call public education. Recall however that form is content. The form of an experience is the true content that experience generates. Spending thirteen-years and then another four-to-six-years showing up on time and doing what we are told is the primary conditioning the system is designed to produce. When culture counterfeits nature’s agenda the experience produced is a different set of qualities and capacities:

- Aggressive
- Arrogant
- Belligerent
- Big-headed
- Boastful
- Boring
- Bossy
- Callous
- Cantankerous
- Careless
- Clinging
- Compulsive
- Cowardly
- Cruel
- Cunning
- Cynical
- Deceitful
- Detached
- Dishonesty
- Dogmatic
- Domineering
- Fearful
- Foolish
- Foolhardy
- Greedy
- Grumpy
- Gullible
- Harsh
- Impatient
- Impolite
- Impulsive
- Inconsiderate
- Inconsistent
- Indecisive
- Indiscreet
- Inflexible
- Interfering
- Intolerant
- Irresponsible
- Jealous

- Lazy
- Machiavellian
- Materialistic
- Mean
- Possessive
- Quarrelsome
- Quick-tempered
- Resentful
- Rude
- Ruthless
- Moody
- Narrow-minded
- Nasty
- Naughty
- Nervous
- Obsessive
- Obstinate
- Overcritical
- Overemotional
- Patronizing
- Pessimistic
- Pompous
- Sarcastic
- Secretive
- Selfish
- Self-centered
- Self-indulgent
- Sneaky
- Stingy
- Stubborn
- Superficial
- Timid
- Unkind
- Unpredictable
- Unreliable
- Untrustworthy
- Vain
- Vengeful
- Vulgar
Read through the list above and imagine experiences that would invite your child, or any child, to become each of these qualities or capacities. What would your relationship with that child feel like at that moment? How would you feel inside? How would you model that quality as a living experience or as a response to a challenge? How do our children learn these states of being except as modelled by you and me, the adult culture?

When I was quite young it became very clear that the quality of my relationship with my teacher predetermined how well I would perform in his or her class. Pleasure and pain was the clue. Pleasure meant feeling safe, related, connected. Pain, not safe and isolated. Feeling safe-enough-to-play invited the top list of qualities. Not feeling safe to play, drew me to the bottom list. Content, as curriculum, rests on this relationship foundation. I sat in the back row and failed my Algebra class because I did not trust or feel comfortable with the cigarette-smoking teacher who was as mechanical as the numbers on the board. I sat in the front row, was interested, engaged and got an ‘A’ in World History because I felt safe enough to play in that class. Form is content. In this case the form is the relationship. Flip the content and teachers around and I would have gotten an ‘A’ in Algebra and flunked World History. When content is the goal it doesn’t matter who the teacher is. You play the win-lose-comparison game that compulsory schooling is. The same pattern applies to “alternative” models and even home schooling:

It may sound strange coming from someone who has spent all his working life teaching in and helping start schools, but I have always been ambivalent toward their existence, even ones I think are pretty good places for kids. Why do I feel this way? Because most schools are:

- Artificial environments where children tend to learn about life second-hand.
- Rich in information and materials, but poor in organic experience filled with meaning and purpose.
- Increasingly isolated in these days of heightened school security that keeps others out and budget cuts that keep students in, placing yet another barrier between children and real-world sources of deep and permanent learning.
- Following a standardized template that has little connection to local conditions, which makes no sense in a nation as geographically and culturally diverse as ours.

Even autonomous schools with unique and flexible approaches have to continually resist the gravitational pull toward taking on the characteristics of institutions by adopting routines and protocols aimed at meeting the mechanical needs of the institution, not the human needs of the participants.

Chris Mercogliano
A School Must Have a Heart, 2014

Increasingly Einstein’s suggestion: “Never memorize something that you can look up,” grows in importance. The Industrial Revolution model of compulsory schooling, as a model of human development, based in content and curriculum, is as out dated and rusty as the steam engine. It is impossible, no matter how many computers or tablets the school buys from big technology firms, to keep up. Content and curriculum is culture’s way of predicting and controlling the population. Real learning is the way experiences elicit and develop qualities and capacities. Content is the playdough, not the goal.

Every experience a child, or you and I, have is a learning experience. Life and our relationship with life is the curriculum, but we miss this most basic and most important goal when content, comparison, and pecking-order is all we see and value.

Model for our children, every day and in every way, the top list and culture’s content becomes trivial, easy-peasy. Focus on content, pecking-order, winning and losing, and we slip, ever so easily, down to the second list, and don’t even know we are doing it because we are obsessed, preoccupied and blinded by content being the goal. The essential point is; what we call content and curriculum is easy, literally child’s play, when learning is play and play is learning.
In *Endangered Minds*, Jane Healy quantified that today’s 6th grade level used to be 4th grade. John Taylor Gatto demonstrated that the more professional and costly education became the poorer the outcomes. Why? John answered that question in our interview: mainstream schooling and television, (now social media and YouTube), do the same thing but differently. Both are distractions, what Joseph Chilton Pearce calls counterfeits.

Recall the Carnegie study: only 5% of what we learn lifelong is acquired in the form of schooling or formal instruction and of that 5%, children remember only 3% to 5% for any length of time. Easy-peasy. Most of the time and attention our children and we invest in schooling is spent on logistics and dealing with the consequences of millions of bright, but bored children wondering what the heck this is all about.

What on earth would we do with our kids if they weren’t in school? That is the real issue. Mainstream education is extended childcare. That is the real issue. Without compulsory schooling what will they do all day? How much corporate and social media can a child consume before exploding, or committing suicide, which is the leading cause of death for young people.

The greatest challenge is not the child, his or capacity to learn. The monumental challenge is for each adult to care enough about their child, as the future of humanity, that he or she is, to take complete responsibility for modeling, every-day, the top list of qualities, and not be seduced or dumbed-down by culture saying they can’t. Breaking spell that culture weaves is a dramatic paradigm change, a new reality, and we need a new reality to prepare our children for the unprecedented challenges they will face.

Ask yourself: “If my child was one of the last living members of the human race, and he or she would carry the DNA memory that would give birth to a new species, what should that memory contain and how can I gift them that capacity today?”

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If Not Teaching, Then What?

My daughter, Carly Elizabeth, is a regular five-year-old. She mastered the two most-challenging tasks she will ever encounter: standing on two legs, balancing and walking upright, and establishing the foundations for symbolic language by eighteen-months, without one second of formal instruction. By age three she was mastering her second language, built on a completely different structure, again without formal instruction of any kind. What lunacy is it that leads us to believe that this miraculous ability to spontaneously learn comes to an end at age-five, and now requires hour-upon-hour of repetitive ‘instruction’ to survive? Survive what? Not life. To survive the limitations and constraints imposed by culture. And where has culture brought us? Better hygiene, yes. Better roads, better gadgets and also endless wars, and now the brink of ecological collapse. What is it going to take to question all of this? And will this questioning penetrate deeply enough to actually bring about a fundamentally new way of living and relating in our children? If not teaching, then what?

The earliest Montessori schools were not considered schools at all, but “houses for children”: three to six year olds who had suffered massive neglect in severely impoverished slum families. While the children were treated with love and respect in these Montessori houses, discipline, quiet, and order were hallmarks of life there.

By age five most of these children could read and write with some skill, a phenomenon attracting wide attention. Montessori insisted that these children had not been taught to read, nor to write (and they wrote before reading.) The spontaneous writing and reading was no more an intentional part of the experiment than a myriad of other capacities and intelligences the children developed as well, all without “teaching”, which was the whole point.

Montessori’s life-work attempted to show that the child’s mind was “naturally absorbent” and would spontaneously unfold if given the appropriate stimuli in an environment of love and trust. She anticipated Howard Gardner’s “multiple intelligence” theory by seventy years in her own theory of “nebulae”, various constellates of intelligence inherent in the nature of mind, which the child absorbed as and if provided the appropriate environmental stimuli.

The proposal of such “nebulae” received far less attention than her procedures that gave rise to an open-ended, rather than closed, form of stimuli. The nurturing environment must include, of course, all cumulative cultural survival experience, but it must include as well access to experience beyond such basic maintenance matters. The nature of this latter kind of stimulation could only arise from each moment of interaction with a child to escape being but a reflection of the adult’s own limits, as found in our usual maintenance intelligence.

Mistaking information acquisition for education is a major error of contemporary thought. Knowledge, as Montessori pointed out, and David Bohm affirms, is an organic, lived process not itself necessarily translatable into “information” at all. And knowledge, what an unobstructed absorbent mind might experience and become, is open-ended.

Joseph Chilton Pearce on Insight

Mistaking information or data for education is a major error, not only in compulsory schooling, but in culture as we experience it. Love, trust and appropriate, up to the moment modeling, are the prerequisites for spontaneous learning. These are all experiences, not simply ideas or concepts. Even important and well-intended concepts such as emotional intelligence, fall short because the experience is often reduced to a concept. Then we all miss the obvious fact. As a state of the mind, concepts are a very thin, wispy, dream-like and transient firestorm in the brain, no more relevant as an experience than the idea that 2+2=4. And yet, we give supreme importance to our dreamed-up abstractions. When experiences are reduced to concepts and concepts then become the organizing principle, the full spectrum of naturally empathic, naturally compassionate, naturally co-creative, relationship and play based learning collapses into civilization and culture with its dos, don’ts, punishments, rewards and shame. As David Orr notes; our most pressing social, economic and environmental challenges were
created by very educated people. More of the same is suicidal. The state of the mind that created the problem can't correct the problem that state creates, but this is what we expect, as we, like lemmings, rush mechanically off the cliff. The very core of J. Krishnamurti's lifelong efforts reveals the absurdity of this major error. Something else is needed, a completely different approach – and that new approach is not another concept. Not a concept implies a completely different state of the mind. Krishnamurti call this *The Awakening of Intelligence*.

**What place has knowledge and time in the transformation of the mind?**

Note: The use of the word knowledge below is similar in context with what Pearce means by information and data. At the heart of this abridged conversation is a critical insight. As David Bohm notes; *We are faced with a breakdown of general social order and human values that threatens stability throughout the world. Existing knowledge cannot meet this challenge. Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach. Existing knowledge cannot meet this challenge*, and yet, from our conditioned state, existing knowledge is all we have. What else is there?

A: I was very taken with a recent statement of yours in which you said that it’s the responsibility of each human being to bring about his own transformation, which is not dependent on knowledge or time.

K: Seeing the confusion the great misery, the sense of infinite sorrow, any observant and serious person would say that this society cannot possibly be changed except only when the individual, the human being, really transforms himself radically, that is regenerates himself fundamentally. And the responsibility of that depends on the human being not on the mass or on the priests or on a church or a temple or mosque or whatever, but on a human being who is aware of this enormous confusion, politically, religiously, economically, in every direction there is such misery, such unhappiness – because we have created this awful mess in the world.

A: The individual is the one who must make the start.

K: It’s our business as a human being to realize the enormous suffering, misery, confusion there is in the world. And it’s our responsibility to change all that, not the politicians, not the businessman, not the scientist. It’s our responsibility.

A: It is the responsibility of each...

K: Of each human being, yes. Therefore, the question arises, does a human being realize with all seriousness his responsibility not only to himself but to the whole of mankind? Sir, I have been all over and I have talked to and seen thousands and thousands of people. I have been doing this for 50 years and more. Human beings, wherever they live, are more or less the same. They have their problems of sorrow, problems of fear, problems of livelihood, problems of personal relationship, problems of survival, overpopulation and the enormous problem of death – it is a common problem to all of us. There is no eastern problem or western problem... And human beings are caught in this trap.

A: Yes.

K: So are we asking? What place has knowledge in the regeneration of man, in the transformation of man? What place has knowledge and therefore time?

A: Yes. Either we accept that genuine change means the annihilation of what preceded it, or we are talking about a total transformation of something that abides.

K: Revolution in the ordinary sense of that word means, doesn’t it, not an evolution, gradual evolution, it’s a revolution. If you talk to a communist, he wants to overthrow the government, if you talk to a bourgeois he is frightened, if you talk to an intellectual he has various criticisms about revolution. Now, revolution is either bloody, or... there is a revolution in the psyche... The outward is the inner. The inner is the outward. There is not the difference between the outward and the inner. They are totally related to each other... So, when we talk about change, we mean not the mere bloody, physical revolution, but rather the revolution in the makeup of the mind. Of human beings... The way he thinks,
the way he behaves, the way he conducts himself, the way he operates, he functions, the whole of that... What place has knowledge in the regeneration of man which is the inward revolution which will affect the outer? In the very structure and nature of his thought?

A: A change at the root.

K: At the root. Therefore, when there is that change he will naturally bring about a change in society. It isn't society first, or individual first, it is the human change which will transform the society. The human being is the whole, he is the society, he is the separate individual, he is the factor which brings about this chaos... Therefore, he is the world and the world is him.

A: Yes. Therefore, if he changes everything changes. If he doesn't change nothing changes.

K: That's why I am saying that it is so important to understand... that the world is not different from me and that I am the world. This may sound rather simplistic, but it has a very deep, fundamental meaning if you realize what it means, not intellectually, but inwardly, the understanding of it, therefore there is no division. The moment I say to myself, I realize that I am the world and the world is me, then I am not a Christian, nor a Hindu, or a Buddhist--nothing, I am a human being... Therefore, from that arises the question, can that human mind bring about a regeneration in itself and be free to reincarnate now?

A: Now?

K: Now.

A: Yes.

K: And you see, culture is different from civilization. Culture implies growth.

A: Oh yes.

K: Growth in the flowering of goodness.

A: A lovely phrase.

K: That is culture—real culture—is the flowering in goodness, you understand sir, and that doesn't exist. We have civilization, you can travel from India to America in a few hours, you have better bathrooms, better this and better that, and so on, with all the complications that involves. That has been the western culture which has been absorbed in the East. Goodness is the very essence of culture. [True] religion is the transformation of man. Not all the beliefs, churches and the idolatry of the Christians or the Hindus. That's not religion. So we come back to the point, if one sees all this in this world—observes it, not condemn it or justify it, just to observe it, then from that one asks: man has collected such enormous information, knowledge, and has that knowledge changed him into goodness? You follow sir, into a culture that will make him flower in this beauty of goodness. It has not.

A: No, it has not.

K: Therefore, it has no meaning.

A: Excursions into defining goodness is not going to help us.

K: You can give explanations, definitions, but definitions are not the reality.

A: Of course not.

K: The word isn't the thing. The description isn't the described... So we come back again. Because personally I am tremendously concerned with this question: how to change man. I go to India every year for three months or five months and I see what is happening there, and I see what is happening in Europe, and I see what is happening in this country, in America, and I can't tell you what shock it gives me each time I come to these countries—the degeneration, the superficiality, the intellectual concepts galore without any substance, without any basis or ground in which the beauty of goodness,
of reality can grow. So, saying all that, what place has knowledge in the regeneration of man? That is the basic question.

A: Yes.

K: Let’s be clear on this. In the practical, technological--I must know where I am going, physically, and so on. Now, what place has that, which is human experience as well as scientific knowledge, what place has that in changing the quality of a mind that has become brutal, violent, petty, selfish, greedy, ambitious and all the rest of that? What place has knowledge in that?

A: We are going back to the statement we began with--namely that this transformation is not dependent on knowledge, then the answer would have to be, it doesn't have a place.

K: Therefore, let’s find out what are the limits of knowledge.

A: Yes.

K: Freedom from the known--where does that freedom begin? The human mind is constructed on knowledge. It has evolved through millennia on this accretion, on tradition, on knowledge. It is there, and all our actions are based on that knowledge.

A: Which by definition must be repetitious.

K: I have experienced something yesterday that has left a mark. That is knowledge, and with that knowledge I meet the next experience. So the next experience is translated in terms of the old and therefore that experience is never new.

A: So in a way, if I understand you correctly, I approach [the present] on the basis of holding my previous knowledge up as a mirror to determine the nature of this new thing.

K: Quite.

A: And this could be a rather crazy mirror.

K: Generally, it is. Where is freedom in relation to knowledge? Or is freedom something other than the continuity of knowledge?

A: Must be something other.

K: Which means, if one goes into it very, very deeply, it means the ending of knowledge.

A: Yes.

K: And what does that mean, what does it mean to end knowledge. Whereas, I have lived entirely on knowledge. How is the mind which strives, acts, functions on image, on knowledge, on the known--how is it to end that?

Dr. Allen W. Anderson, professor of religious studies, Indian and Chinese scriptures and the oracular tradition with J. Krishnamurti.

Direct experience, embodied, as complete attention, is the clearest example. As Krishnamurti noted earlier, “with complete attention there is no observer, no thought, no culture.” Rather, Montessori’s naturally absorbent mind is fully active, alert and sensitive. As her abused and neglected children reading and writing attest, experience is the real and only teacher. The magnificent, but effervescent intellect, with its perpetual stream of thought-bubbles, can and does abstract the experience for future reference, but not for a second can it replace it or stand on its own, other than as a collection of index cards. With complete attention what Krishnamurti calls the full spectrum of innate intelligence opens, and not simply the mechanical repetition of another idea or concept. Below that teacher describes what a school, and by implication a way of parenting, that offers this depth.

The Intent of a School
It is becoming more and more important, in a world that is destructive and degenerating, that there should be a place, an oasis, where one can learn a way of living that is whole, sane and intelligent.
Education in the modern world has been concerned with the cultivation, not of intelligence, but of intellect, of memory and its skills. In this process little occurs beyond passing information from the teacher to the taught, the leader to the follower, bringing about a superficial and mechanical way of life. In this there is little human relationship.

Surely a school is a place where one learns about the totality, the wholeness of life. Academic excellence is absolutely necessary, but a school includes much more than that. It is a place where both the teacher and the taught explore not only the outer world, the world of knowledge, but also their own thinking, their behavior. From this they begin to discover their own conditioning and how it distorts their thinking. This conditioning is the self to which such tremendous and cruel importance is given. Freedom from conditioning and its misery begins with this awareness. It is only in such freedom that true learning can take place. In this school it is the responsibility of the teacher to sustain with the student a careful exploration into the implications of conditioning and thus end it.

A school is a place where one learns the importance of knowledge and its limitations. It is a place where one learns to observe the world not from any particular point of view or conclusion. One learns to look at the whole of man’s endeavor, his search for beauty, his search for truth and for a way of living without conflict. Conflict is the very essence of violence. So far education has not been concerned with this, but in this school our intent is to understand actuality and its action without any preconceived ideals, theories or belief, which bring about a contradictory attitude toward existence.

The school is concerned with freedom and order. Freedom is not the expression of one’s own desire, choice or self-interest. That inevitably leads to disorder. Freedom of choice is not freedom, though it may appear so; nor is order, conformity or imitation. Order can only come with the insight that to choose is itself the denial of freedom.

In school one learns the importance of relationship which is not based on attachment and possession. It is here one can learn about the movement of thought, love and death, for all this is our life. From the ancient of times, man has sought something beyond the materialistic world, something immeasurable, something sacred. It is the intent of this school to inquire into this possibility.

This whole movement of inquiry into knowledge, into oneself, into the possibility of something beyond knowledge, brings about naturally a psychological revolution, and from this comes inevitably a totally different order in human relationship, which is society. The intelligent understanding of all this can bring about a profound change in the consciousness of mankind.

This original Intent was written by J. Krishnamurti in 1975 when Oak Grove School was founded. It was revised by Krishnamurti and the school staff in 1984 to its present form.

Personally, I know of no other mission or vision that focuses on inquiry into knowledge, into oneself, and into the possibility of something beyond knowledge. Here we find the significance of Krishnamurti’s most distilled invitation: it’s the responsibility of each human being to bring about his own transformation, which is not dependent on knowledge or time.
Attention Opens the Door

Preface: Think of a pyramid with the wide base at the bottom. Biology and the sensory-motor brain are bedrock of our uniquely human experience and generate images of our physical relationship with the world; what we touch, taste, other senses and proprioception, how we move through the environment generating our present, immediate here-and-now experience. Resting on this base is the limbic, relational-emotional brain, producing what we call emotional-images or feelings of how we are doing inside as we experience what is outside, which is influenced by a much wider memory net. And way on top, the very tip of the pyramid, is the neocortex, what we think and imagine, a highly abstract image making system with vast access to past memory and an unlimited ability to project, imagine, forward. The entire system is built from the immediate concrete to greater and greater degrees of interpretive abstractions, thought and imagination being totally conceptual, fabrications, illusory. Once opened and developed, this capacity to imagine produces internal images that are so powerful that they trick the limbic and sensory-motor brains into reacting to what is imagined as if it were real, independent, and actual, meaning that the entire system assumes that what is being imagined is ‘real,’ and not just an image.

Now, the ability of this relatively new capacity to create abstract mental images that overwhelm the entire field of perception evolved so fast and involved such powerful images that the brain failed to develop an internal mechanism that keeps track of what it is doing. The next imagined image explodes in perception, and like Chicken Little, we think the sky is falling, over and over again, like a snowball racing down a hill, getting bigger and bigger, without any brakes or parachute. And we call this ‘reality.’

For centuries sages have realized this crazy state of affairs and have proposed various systems, practices, meditations and rituals in hopes of bringing the system back to its natural order, that is, for the cognitive activity of the neocortex to function scientifically, without being overly influenced by its unbridled capacity to imagine all sorts of things; superstitions, fantasies and false projections, such as racism and nationalism, personal pride, vanity, greed, bigotry and various other self-centered fabrications.

Implicit in this challenge is the way that thought and imagination assumes that its’ functions represent the high altar of intelligence. True intelligence is infinitely woven into the two primary brain centers, sensory and relational. While a very useful tool the capacity to abstract, imagine and project into the future is just that, a tool. To mistake the tool for intelligence is at the very core of our personal and global crisis, which will continue to deepen and darken until we wake up to what we are doing.

Scientists know that a problem can’t be solved at the level of the problem. The capacity to imagine can’t correct or bring to order what it imagines. Thought can rearrange the furniture endlessly but the system and our attention remains stuck in the imaginary field that creates the problem in the first place. The illusion that one is solving the problem perpetuates the state that creates the problem. Expanding on the insights offered by physicist David Bohm, the following suggests that attention, and not more content as concept, is the key to this age old dilemma. Buddhists refer to this simple and sane insight as mindfulness. Complete attention to the present experience stops and therefore negates one’s percolating imagination, hopefully long enough to become aware of what we are doing to ourselves and others, and in that gap we might discover who and what we really are.

Enjoy mm

Attention, not content, is the key that opens the door

Attention is illusive. It seems to be the focusing of something, but what? Whatever it is – it appears to morph and become what it perceives. The atmosphere carries clouds, but we don’t see the atmosphere. We don’t see light, rather we see what light bounces off of. Yet, this invisible stuff called attention is grand central station, the core capacity that defines our entire life. Everything we do, feel, think, remember, ponder, plan, and experience is shaped by the quality of attention we invest in each activity.
Like light, pure attention appears neutral, free of content and therefore meaning. Attention gains meaning by focusing on an experience. The quality of our attention, and our capacity to invest attention in each experience, gives meaning and defines how each experience influences our lives.

There are high and low levels of attention. Of the infinite variety and intensity of sensations and internal processes that take place each moment, only a tiny few are given attention and therefore become conscious experiences. Being healthy or sick, rested or tired, what we eat, the time of day, and many other factors dramatically affect the quality and our level of attention. And there are sensitivity thresholds of attention in relationship to various sensations or processes. Some people are more sensitive than others to specific influences, hearing for example. Some people have robust immune systems. Others are more vulnerable. These two qualities, the amount or volume of attention and our sensitivity threshold at that moment combine and define what we experience and what we experience is what we are. So, attention becomes a relative wild-card that defines what we experience and the meaning of that experience.

Other factors that impact the quality of our attention, and therefore the quality of our lives, are time or sustainability and coherence or fragmentation. Some people are able to invest considerable attention in an activity for a sustained period of time. They can, as we say, “pay attention.” Others can’t. They drift, or disassociate. Attention jumps from one thing to another. Another defining factor is the ability to focus on a given activity, coherent attention, as opposed to fragmented attention, splitting attention in two or more ways at the same time. A third factor is the preexisting emotional context or history we have with any given experience. If similar experience was painful in the past, we will be guarded when we invest attention in the current experience. Our attention will be skewed or biased and this will prejudge the influence and meaning we give to the experience.

It is easy to see that the combined influence of these qualities dramatically changes the nature and quality of our experience – and this dramatically alters what and in what way experiences define our lives. Superficially, which is our normal state, we assume that we are objective. When we become aware of the many ways that the quality of our attention varies, moment to moment, we discover that we are not objective. What we call true, sane and objective is relative, not absolute. So, in a general way, we agree that our relative reality conforms to that of most and therefore we are considered normal and somewhat sane. And this general and somewhat vague norm becomes reality and this is where we live, except sometimes.

I like the image of the vast electromagnetic spectrum and the thin slice called the visible spectrum that defines what we see in our normal reality. Clearly there is much more that we do not see. The same is true for each of our senses and for wavelengths of energy from the Newtonian concrete to the Quantum abstract.

My friend J. Krishnamurti, and I feel comfortable using that word friend, said often that the “content of consciousness is consciousness,” to which I add, “as we experience it.” Such a strange statement. Like light, the sky and attention, what we perceive as consciousness is its content. What we call reality is the content attention holds. Examining deeper there must be sky before clouds, light before the object light reveals, and attention before it morphs into the endless stream of content we experience as reality. Holding this obvious fact, ask the question; are we pure attention without content, or are we the content attention illuminates? On which side this coin lands changes everything.

The Tibetans, and perhaps other traditions, say both. There is a relative reality created by the content that defines our consciousness, and there is a different, absolute reality of pure attention without any content. When attention is focused on the content of consciousness, that content is our reality, which is the world as we know it. When consciousness is free of this conditioned content, this represents a different reality, a state that content can never capture, know or understand.

We only “know” consciousness because of its content. We see clouds because of the sky but we don’t see the sky. But then, who or what are we really? The clouds or the sky - what light bounces off of or pure light? This question is perhaps the most important in human history.
The content of consciousness, the known, expresses as culture and its inner twin, the images we have about ourselves, our social self or ego. The known is the past, is knowledge, but more fundamentally the known, as knowledge, is an abstraction, like imaginary clouds floating in an imaginary sky. The mental images that knowledge is are like video programs on a screen.

They appear to move and be alive but they aren’t. The images that past knowledge produces are counterfeits of life. Zombies come to mind. Something that appears to be alive but is in fact - not.

This collective known brought us civilization and technology and also created the sixth-great-extinction on planet earth, snowballing exponentially, and we are each identified with that. That abstract, dead content, which is likely to wipe out 95% of lifeforms as we know it, is who we think we are. How will continued identification with that content of consciousness serve our children as this snowball continues to grow and then - come crashing down? We are identified with something dead and don’t know it. And more of the same, the hope that technology dangles, deepens our doomed identity, for both technology and our identification with the past, self and culture, come from the same root, the same false abstracted identity. Handing a starving person a menu will not save him. We are identified with the menu and not with life that gives life. If continued identification with abstract mental images of the past, knowledge, self and culture, is suicidal, and it may be, what would identification with life feel like? This brings us to one of Krishnamurti’s most distilled insights.

It is the responsibility for each individual to bring about their own transformation (of reality, identity and therefore perception-action), which is not dependent on knowledge or time (knowledge and time being the dead past).

Such a radical revolution in the mind occurs much deeper than content, at the very root level called attention, opening perception to insight, a quality of fresh and new patterns and possibilities not found when looking in the rear view mirror. Coming from nature, the meaning we unfold from these insights and their actions are fundamentally whole, appropriate, organic and ecological. Identification with this spontaneous, always awakening quality of attention, is identification with life, which is creation, creation grounded in nature and not in imagined, dead abstractions.

Recall, we become what we give our attention to. If we are identified with ideas, nationalism, racism and white supremacy, preoccupied being a Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist or Jew, or with science, the latest technology, that is what we are, at the exclusion of everything else. Imagine being identified with life, with nature and the creative processes life and nature imply. Imagine knowing deeply, fundamentally that you are the son or daughter of life and not the abstracted images created by culture. No such image could hold you. You would be unconditionally free and that freedom would unleash in you tremendous power. But this deep, fundamental knowing, this true identity, cannot be realized if we believe we are the image thought-as-self or thought-as-culture have created, and have done so for thousands of years creating a field, like the gravitational force of Jupiter, that holds us. The source that created this field cannot be negated by that source, which is what our addiction to content attempts to do.

The key to experiencing our true identity is attention. There is a quality of attention that is not occupied, and therefore not trapped and limited by content, by the known. In that attention thought-as-self and thought-as-culture do not exist. The first step is for you and me to discover this new quality of attention and true identity in ourselves, and then, like the oxygen masks dangling in a crashing airplane, adjust the straps of the new identity for our children. Then, breathe deeply.
Not More Imagination but Imagination of a Certain Kind

Sometime, perhaps 50,000 years ago or more, a relatively thin layer of neurons, emerging out of and covering the ancient sensory-motor and limbic-emotional brain centers, exploded - and along with it memory of the distant past and more revolutionary projections into the future. The capacity to create mental images not presented by the sensory or emotional systems grew like a supernova, including the use of symbols, language and metaphor; a word, for example, standing in place of a thing. So powerful and explosive was this new image-making capacity that it quickly swamped the other systems, filing what we call consciousness with dream-images that were so real that we forgot that we were dreaming. Like a giant snowball of dream-images, once set into motion this capacity grew by one dream image triggering another and another, creating a virtual reality machine unparalleled in the known universe.

Now, we think 50,000 years is a long time, but consider that dinosaurs first walked the earth 230 million years ago and dominated the land for 160 million years. They became extinct a brief 65 million years ago. Humans and their ancestors have been walking the planet for about 6 million years. Homo sapiens, the modern form of humans evolved 300,000 years ago from Homo erectus. Human civilizations started forming around 6,000 years ago, just a blink of time.

Imagination is the core capacity that makes civilization possible. Symbols and language formed concepts like nations, empires, systems of belief, ideas about past and future, values, agriculture, racism, accounting, banks, interest, credit, schooling, the space shuttle, baseball, atomic bomb, and so much more. All are grounded in imagination. No doubt, imagination is what makes humans – human.

Joseph Chilton Pearce describes how all this takes place in the brain:

Look at the growth of language itself, and the relationship between word and thing. When the little child is in their own nest, they think anything is safe to interact with. They want to taste it, touch it, smell it, feel it, and immediately say: what is that, mamma, what is that, daddy? They are asking for a name label for the object. When you give them a name, the word and the thing build into the brain as a single neural pattern or field. The name builds in as an integral part of the whole ‘structure of knowledge,’ as Piaget calls it. The brain responds to each experience by creating these structures of knowledge. The name and the thing build as a single unit. We call this concrete language. The word and the thing are the same to the early child. Ask the two-year old child to say the word hand, and they move their hand when they say it. Why? Because hand means something very tangible, something very concrete. The early child can’t deal with abstractions.

When you take the child out in the open, away from the nest, all mammalian animals respond the same way. The child spots an object. Let’s say, it’s a dirty, nasty, old dog. The child will stop, if they have never seen one before, point toward the object, and silently turn around and stare at the caretaker, and wait for a signal from the parent that they perceive this particular object. Getting that signal, the child immediately wants to know: what is that, mamma? They ask for a name.

Let’s suppose that it’s a dirty, nasty, awful looking, old mongrel dog. Mamma says, don’t dare touch that dirty, nasty old dog. Mamma’s acknowledgment of the dog is all the child needs. This is the model imperative. The child is impelled. They are driven, by nature, to interact with the object and build a structure of knowledge of it. Now, the mother’s emotional state of that, her horror, alarm, etc., etc., builds into the structure of knowledge as an integral part of it. Her name for the object, dirty, nasty, old dog, is built into the structure of knowledge. All that is without any evaluation on the part of the child.

Suppose you use the word in absence of the thing. Here an auditory vibration resonates with a previously established set of responses in the brain. What does the brain do? The brain will create an inner image in the absence of the exterior sensory image. We are not just processing what the reptilian brain and all the other animal brains can do, but creating an image that doesn’t exist at all, in response to a name of that thing that does exist.
This leads us into play and imagination. As the adult uses all of these words the child's mind starts responding with internal imagery in every case it can. And that leads us to storytelling, which is an integral part of language development, language being the flow of inner imagery triggered by symbols and metaphors. You will find that the child responds to storytelling very early, even before they can talk. In storytelling the word comes in as a vibration, which is only a sensory input, and that challenges the whole brain, not just to create an image in keeping with each word, but to create moving imagery, fluid imagery that follows the flow of the words. It sets up an inner world scenario representing the story which is constantly shifting according to shifting of the words themselves. This is a major challenge of the brain and its development. The job is so enormous that the child goes into total entrainment. All of the energy moves into this creation of inner imagery. They go catatonic. The body stops all movement, their jaw drops down, their eyes get big and wide, and they are literally not in this world. Their eyes open wide. They are not looking at anything outwardly. They are looking at the marvelous world that is forming within.

Every new story means new neural connections must be made between all the fields involved in imagery, creating vast sensory maps in brain. New fields must be established with each story. The brain has to continually expand its neural connections. Remember, the neural connections are what count, not just the number of neurons, but the neural connections. So, each new story demands what? A complete, new re-routing of the neural patterns themselves. It means the brain has to continually expand and expand its operations, auditory, visual, sensory fields, and much more with each story.

Why does the child want to hear the same story over and over and over? Anytime a field establishes long range connections with other fields. And it’s those that must be myelinated, that is, firmly established, to lock in a pattern and preserve the activities of that particular neural field and its capacities. Once these fields stabilize and those connections become firm, then the child will want to move on to another story. Once the neural fields are stabilized the child will want to act out the imagery, act out the inner world they have created. This completes the circuitry.

Once this inner world is created they want to take the internal world and project it back out onto their external world. As Vygotsky, the great Russian, said, "they want to modify the external world by the internal world, and play in a world of their own creation". The little tiny child has discovered this great secret that her own internal capacities of creation can modify and make a profound difference in her own external world. And upon this – the capacity to imagine - her future and the future of our world depends.

The Swedish Pediatrics Institute came out with a study showing that the child with imagination was far less prone to violence than a child without imagination. Why? Because the child without imagination is subject to the immediate sensory environment bombarding them without any alternatives. If their sensory environment bombarding them is unpleasant, or demeaning, or insulting, or threatening, they have no choice, out of their survival drive, but to immediately lash out against the sensory input which is threatening, and try to change it. Whereas, the child with imagination will immediately create an alternate inner scenario in which they don't have to undergo all that. And through that, they can sift through and find an alternate mode of response to this, an alternate behavior that is not violent and that doesn't react to the violence with more violence, whatever it might be, but reacts with much higher cortical structures.

The child without imagination is operating out of purely ancient, reptilian sensory motor response patterns of defense against a hostile world. Whereas, the child with imagination is using much higher evolutionary cortical structures for doing what? Creating an inner world in which this is not the case, but in which something else is taking place. Don't forget this when looking at the massive rise of violence today, the collapse of descriptive language and storytelling in early childhood, pushed out by sensory motor visual images on screens.
For 6,000 years or more images created by our capacity to imagine have flooded the brain. Imagination, focused and empowered by passion can and does change the world. So powerful and enchanting are these images however, that we forget they are images, we forget that we are creating them, and reify the creation, treating the abstract image as independent, concrete reality. Without realizing what we are doing our imagined-images are converted into memes, mental viruses that spread from person to person within a culture. True or false, memes carry cultural ideas, symbols, or practices from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or now via the internet and social media, and soon, like Chicken Little, we all believe the sky is falling. As we explored, the First Enlightenment distilled some of our fantasy images, superstitions, such as black cats bringing bad luck, but it failed to penetrate deeply. A great deal of imagined content slipped through the cracks of critical attention; all the images and beliefs that make up culture, our personal self-images, egos and much more.

As David Bohm described, we are completely immersed in the process, playing with mental images that are so convincing that we actually believe the dreams we are dreaming forgetting that we are dreaming. We lack a critical understanding of the process and how it functions. Throughout the ages a few sages discovered what the brain is doing and described our enchantment in great detail. Alas, the show is too mesmerizing for most. Waking from the dream takes a quality of attention most simply don’t have, a quality of attention that is not completely hypnotized by the process. Attention, therefore, is the key to transformation, not more of the same, not another concept or great idea, but almost no one has any attention that is not infected.

Yes, we need to cultivate imagination by turning back the technological clock and replacing screen-time with descriptive language. But that is not good enough. We must break the spell that we, all of humanity, have been under for thousands of years. We need to evolve a new state of attention that is free, clear and unconditioned, a state that can hold conditioning without being conditioned, an expansive state where the source of what is imagined reaches far beyond what is known. It is here, free from the known, but having access to what is known, that the future of humanity abides. And imagination is the way this unknown future will become known after that new possibility is revealed as insight. (For more on insight, please see the attached essay by Joseph Chilton Pearce.)

The first step in breaking the spell is cultivating a quality of attention that is not overflowing with imagined mental images of any kind. As we described, this is a mighty challenge. Consciousness, as we experience it, is the content created by these images. Where most of us sit, no image means no consciousness. All the various meditation and so-called spiritual practices begin with this cultivation; what Buddhists call mindfulness. The second step, assuming that the first is well established and then using this mindful attention, is to negate all the false images and feelings we have accepted about ourselves and others. This includes our nationality, our religious and political beliefs, our culture, comparisons, envies, jealousies, prejudices, hatreds, all the images we have about ourselves and everyone else, our pride, psychological fears and vanities - all of it. Suddenly there is vast space and enormous energy and attention not being wasted by this imagined dog chasing its imaginary tail. With this distilled, clear, unadulterated, uncluttered, coherent state of attention we can evoke the awesome power to imagine, calling on everything known, and more importantly, all that is unknown, grounded now in our authentic nature, wholeness and well-being for everything, not just our petty self-concept and puny beliefs.

It is not simply more imagination but imagination of a critical kind that will save us. With a mind distilled, like crystal clear water, imagination becomes the ultimate tool for wholeness, wellbeing and mutual survival as nature intended. Just as the child grows through ages and stages, so too does imagination. Language evolved and three-cheers it did. The capacity for math and reason evolved and for good reason. The Second Enlightenment focuses at the root, bringing new clarity to what we have been doing blindly for 6,000 years. Now it is time, past time really, for imagination to evolve, not as simply as a capacity, rather how that amazing capacity is used, by what quality of brain; fragmented, isolated, self-centered and neurotic or integrated, whole, empathic and with laser precision.
The quality of imagination, in the service of what kind of brain, defines what is envisioned and how our creative potential is expressed and therefore the future of humanity. As very early development specialists know so well; this critical quality is impossible without a strong, nature centered and integrated foundation that only early nurturing can provide.

Ask yourself; is a mind overflowing with social media, political conflict and corporate propaganda masquerading as news or a mind deeply conditioned by twelve to eighteen years of institutional schooling capable of this clear and expansive quality of mind? Will more of the same meet and resolve the challenges we face or deepen the crisis?

Not another concept, rather attention is the key. Each adult must break the spell in and for themselves. They must discover this expansive state of attention that is not marinating in cultural memes and model, by resonance, that quality for their children. As media-literacy was in the past, exposing the form, structure and function of media, imagination-literacy is the challenge, today and into the future. Imagination-literacy applies conscious and critical attention to the capacity to create mental images not present to the sensory system. Imagination-literacy is the prerequisite and critical to the health and well-being of the world’s children, as well as to the future of that world and all its species. Only by distilling our personal imagination will we see what must be done. More of the same is more of the same. Let’s get going and not a moment to lose.
Media and The Mind

The question is; can we use image and information technologies without them infecting us and changing how we perceive, how we feel, what we think about, value and behave? The answer is no, so proceed with caution.

What most fail to consider is that media, symbols, words and pictures, which includes the internet - mimic the brain’s own symbolic and image making capacity. Think of media: written text, books, videos, graphic illustrations, photographs, etc., as external forms of communal or shared imagination. As we will explore below, it is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to live in a mediated-reality and remain grounded in what we used to call reality. Reality used to be the resonate-representations of the external world created in the brain by our unique set of human senses. This unique set defined being human. In the not too distant past the neocortex exploded and added an inner-dimension to this sensory based reality, the imaginative world of inner-images not generated by our senses, rather by the brain itself. Imagination, by its very nature, is a subjective-virtual-reality that we very often mistake as objective. The bigger and more complex our capacity to imagine grew, the more this subjective reality overshadowed our objective, sensory reality.

Today this communal subjective-virtual-reality circles the globe, is being syphoned into mobile computers that many carry 24/7 and is being fed daily with a never-ending tsunami of counterfeit imagination surrogates. Is it any wonder that we are more confused, more opinionated, and more manipulated than any generation in human history? With the exponential growth of media and technology, doubling every few months, what we used to call reality, or ‘truth,’ matters less and less. Add to this that powerful forces that intentionally pour misinformation, propaganda and censorship to further distort our feeling of being grounded in objective truth. The ability of technology to profile each individual and selectively deliver messages based on that profile, messages that may be factual or not, is further clouding what is considered real. Real is whatever subjective-virtual-reality you accept and identify with. This is not new, just infinitely more complex and intense. And this is the evermore confusing, unstable and wobbly reality the absorbent mind of the next generation is adapting to, all made possible by image and information based technologies.

As a documentary filmmaker and commercial photographer for over fifty-years, with a passion for theater, the world of image and media is no stranger. Perhaps this background is part of the reason I’m cautious about these technologies. Don’t get me wrong. I use image, information and communication technologies every day. It’s great to look up stuff; word definitions, maps, locations, the weather, reviews for the coolest restaurants. You know. That is the general perception, isn’t it? That we use it – rather than it using us. When I think of the impact of commercial and political exploitation of media and the internet, especially on the innocent developing brains of young children, a scene from the Academy Award winning film, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, comes to mind. The large Native American, Chief Bromden (Will Sampson), who faked being deaf and mute, said to R.P. McMurphy (Jack Nicholson):

The last time I seen my father, he was blind and diseased from drinking. And every time he put the bottle to his mouth, he didn’t suck out of it, it sucked out of him until he shrunk so wrinkled and yellow even the dogs didn’t know him.

Something very creepy is happening all over the world, in our homes, offices, in our pockets and purses. Could it be that we have it backwards, that media is using us rather than we are using media and the internet? We know we are addicted. Every click is being watched, counted, analyzed and used to control us in small ways and in very big ways. Like the dying man’s bottle, media-technologies, which mimic the inner-imagery the brain produces, sucks attention out of us while we think we are sucking something out of it. And the folks that create and use these technologies know it. Ask Google and Facebook.

The inner-images we call thought, language, and metaphor and the outer-images we call media and the internet are the same field or mental realm. Looking inward we see thought and imagination. Looking outward we see the internet and media.
Joseph Chilton Pearce and others have described how the displacement of descriptive language by visual media impairs the brain’s ability to both imagine and imagine with clarity and lucid objectivity, two separate and important distinctions. More intimately, it is scary to consider how image-technologies affect brain development, perception, mental processing and values. Years ago I met with Jerry Mander, author of *The Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, in my view the best work ever on the impact these technologies have on the human mind.

Working in advertising allowed me to understand how easy that was to move information into people’s consciousness. If you had enough money and understood the media it was easy to change public consciousness. At first this was fun and amusing. After a while I was horrified by it.

Billions of dollars are spent every year to encourage people to live a certain way and all the ads are identical. One’s advertising a Ford. One’s advertising toothpaste, but the goal’s the same. The average viewer gets 22,000 of these powerful messages each year on television. 22,000 messages telling you that you are not adequate and that the only thing that will satisfy your inadequacy is a product, which must be bought.

*What are the four arguments?*

There are really hundreds of arguments, which are described in four categories. The first is Environmental. The second is Political. The third is Personal in terms of personal consciousness. And the fourth deals with Communications, what kinds of information pass through the media, and what kinds don’t?

The environmental argument is based on how we have moved our consciousness inside artificial forms - from the natural world to that of a mediated reality. Television has a major role to play in the mediation of consciousness, the mediation of reality.

The political argument explores how the use of advertising and television benefits some people more than other people. Advertising and television provide extremely powerful tools to unify consciousness, tools which are more immediate, direct and faster than anything that ever preceded it.

The third argument describes how television affects people. What it does to kids. What it does to the way we understand ourselves. What it does to thinking. What it does to our psychology.

The fourth argument explores how television threatens democracy. Television accepts certain kinds of information while rejecting others. Conversations like this would be boring on television and yet violence, sex and sports work well. The medium has a built in bias.

*From the Four Arguments For the Elimination of Television, 1978*

**Replacement of Experience**

America had become the first culture to substitute secondary mediated versions of experience for direct experience of the world. Interpretations and representations of the world were being accepted, as experience, and the difference between the two were obscure for most of us...

People’s patterns of discernment, discrimination and understanding were taking a dive. They didn’t seem able to make distinctions between information which was preprocessed and filtered through a machine, and that which came to them whole, by actual experience...

If people believed that an image of nature was equal to or even similar to the experience of nature, and were therefore satisfied enough with the image that they didn’t seek out the real experience, then nature was in a lot bigger trouble than anyone realized.

**The Illusion of Neutral Technology**

Far from being "neutral" television itself predetermines who shall use it, how they will use it, what effects it will have, on individual lives, and if it continues to be widely used, what sorts of political forms will inevitably emerge.


**Sensory Deprivation**

Our environment itself is the manifestation of the mental processes of other humans. Of all the species of the planet, and all the cultures of the human species, we twentieth-century Americans have become the first in history to live predominately inside the projections of our own minds.

**The Inherent Need to Create Need**

Advertising exists only to purvey what people don't need. Whatever people do need they will find without advertising if it is valuable... Advertisers sell their services on the basis of how well they are able to create needs where there were none before. I have never met an advertising person who sincerely believes that there is a need connected to, say, 99 percent of the commodities which fill the air waves and print media... In fact, advertising intervenes between people and their (real) needs, it separates them from direct fulfillment and urges them to believe that satisfaction can only be obtained through commodities.

How does this bias affect our experience and the programs we see on television and implicitly internet imagery?

Television exploits a genetic fight-flight tendency in human beings. When living in pre-industrial environments we had to be aware of changes in the environment to survive. Television comes along and presents images which trigger the same survival response. If something violent is happening on television, we react. We may be intellectually aware that the violence is not "real" but our emotions don't discriminate. They react. It is part of our survival reflex and advertisers and programmers exploit this tendency as much as possible.

To exploit means to use something to one's advantage or to take advantage of another's weakness. Advertisers, and the corporations they serve, are extremely sophisticated in exploiting television in this way, especially when it comes to children.

It became very clear, observing my kids watching television, that they were entering an artificial reality, one where people no longer remember what the world was like without television. It is a reality cut off from the natural world - one created and controlled by a limited number of corporations to sell products people really don't need.

I was very, very worried about that and with good reason. We already have a generation of people who don't know that there was ever a world without a television. They can't imagine what life would have been like without television. Look how we have moved through the technological age and how it has established a new reality, which has no relationship to the intrinsic values of nature. This is tremendously tragic and the main reason I wrote the book.

You describe how this new reality, driven by television (and by implication the internet), is spreading like a huge wave all over the globe.

It came out of love for my own kids and also the observation that the next generation won't care about, or even remember nature. They won't remember the experiences, thoughts and feelings, which happen outside of television's mediated reality. They won't care about it, which of course will doom us.

I think that's already happened in our country and it is spreading, along with television and computers, throughout the world. Emotional concern for nature is way down, even though more and more people are going to parks, which I call nature zoos. They go and observe it as if they were going to the zoo. Relatively few people experience real wilderness or have the feelings and perceptions which nature brings. That's very, very serious.

Through intimate human relationships a basic sense of trust and empathy enfold, and that includes intimate relationships with nature, which is our true nature. That connection is broken when you split the mother from the baby. Trust isn't there. The child grows more and more defensive, self-centered, isolated, which the altered reality created by television and computers intensify.
If you can’t trust or feel empathy for mom and dad, family and community, how are we ever going to address the mounting ecological challenges? We are going to form a personal identity. Will it be based on the selfish-defensive forces we call culture, or our authentic nature, which is transcendent creation, not grounded in abstract concepts, but grounded in nature. This is the core issue.

Circling back to the future, as David Bohm described, we don’t really understand how thought works. Thought happens so fast and with such emotional resonance that we quickly forget or lose track of what is happening, or more precisely, we fail to keep track of what we are doing to ourselves and others. And on this already shaky foundation we now have the global influence of technologically enhanced communal and yet subjective virtual-reality, including intentional manipulation, misinformation, propaganda and censorship. This is our reality. And upon this massive, some maintain intentional state of confusion, we, and more importantly our children, are expected to meet and solve the global crisis this confusion has and will continue to create. Realizing this, a rare few have pointed to the exit:

It is the responsibility of each human being to bring about his own transformation, which is not dependent on knowledge or time.

J. Krishnamurti

In Krishnamurti’s parlance, knowledge and time reside in the abstract state we have been describing, those very thin, wispy, dream-like cognitive mental images floating like clouds in a vast, open sky we call mind. Of itself, the cloud, like most of our abstract education is meaningless, other than as a metaphor pointing to and representing something else, which is not an abstraction, rather an experience. But the enchanting power of the image is so compelling that it sucks up nearly all of our available attention. We get lost and believe the dream, the same way counterfeit dream-cloud images are now being projected into our brains by image and information based technologies, mobile computers and the internet.

The abstract mental metaphor called thought, and its animation like repetition, one thought following another and another in the mind, create the appearance of time. But that appearance is just an appearance. What is actual is the vast, open sky we call mind that this thought-cloud is floating in. This inward play of cloud-imagery called thought, projected outwardly, creates culture. Information and image-based technologies exists as thought does, embedded in the virtual reality we call culture. On close examination, the inner image called thought and the outer image called media-technology are the same, as are the inner image we have about ourselves that we call ego, and the outer meta-egotistical image we call culture. All of this exists and lives in the inner virtual realm called personal thought-knowledge-time, and the outer virtual reality called culture. What most fail to see is that the inner and outer are two sides of the same coin. There is one field or realm. When viewed inwardly we see thought and ego. When viewed outwardly we see media, technology and culture. But it is all the same.

“Not dependent on knowledge and time,” is the instantaneous transformation that Buddhism, Krishnamurti, Bohm and Joseph Chilton Pearce describe as ‘living in insight.’ “Not dependent on knowledge and time,” is a state of the mind that frees attention from its enchantment with this self-induced virtual reality. Like an exploding super-nova, suddenly what awareness becomes aware of is infinite, no longer limited to the puny, repetitive conditioning that reincarnates our enchanting virtual reality. Why so enchanting? Because the entire system of conditioned thought and its reflexes is essentially defensive, fear-threat driven, and our images of self and culture mirror this.

There is another state that evokes inner images; innate wonder, curiosity and play. Being free from threat, therefore free from images of self and culture, the child-like mind plays, discovering and creating new patterns and possibilities. And the difference between these two forms of inner imagery, defensive ego-culture and playful creation, is fear or its absence. Fear evokes images that are essentially defensive and therefore self-centered. The absence of fear expands attention and play infinitely, with its implicit wholeness, empathy and appropriateness for everything, not sacrificing everything in the service of self-defense. Each of these frames-of-mind create a context for identity. Do we identify with threat, fear and defense, which culture is, or do we identify with wholeness and wellbeing for everything, which is our authentic nature? While holding this question, do consider the impact of digital technologies.
As Jerry Mander describes, media, by its very nature, filters out what used to be called objective reality, nature, which is our authentic nature. In its place we get a surrogate counterfeit identity.

The next generation won’t care about, or even remember nature. They won’t remember the experiences, thoughts and feelings, which happen outside of television’s mediated reality. They won’t care about it, which of course will doom us.

I think that’s already happened in our country and it is spreading, along with television and computers, throughout the world. Emotional concern for nature is way down, even though more and more people are going to parks, which I call nature zoos. They go and observe it as if they were going to the zoo. Relatively few people experience real wilderness or have the feelings and perceptions which nature brings. That’s very, very serious.

When our true nature is masked by the virtual reality fear and threat create, that mask is all we see. Once established, the mechanical-associative nature of thought, as a defense reflex, keeps repeating and repeating, creating the appearance that we are the mask and the mask defines everything; our relationships, values, and behaviors. Negate the mask, the fear-driven context for identity, and everything changes, our relationships, values and behaviors.

Yes, you and I must live and model this expansive, infinitely creative state and its implicit identity. To do that, we must first see what we are doing to ourselves and others when we falsely identify with the mask that thought-as-ego and thought-as-culture is. Second, as Krishnamurti implores, each of us must bring about our own transformation which is not dependent on knowledge or time.

It is so simple. But as Samdhong Rinpoche notes, not easy. But the challenge is there and you and I must face it, for our own sanity and for our children.

How do you and I model a state of being that will awaken and expand in my daughter, Carly Elizabeth, and all the Carly’s of the world, the capacity to live a full, authentic, even miraculous human life staring the very real possibility of extinction in the face, to break the destructive spell we call Civilization and rediscover who and what all of us really are – transcendent-nature, and by so doing tip the scales from death back to life in this next, most threatened generation ever?
Putting It All Together

There is the surface *challenge du jure*, of the moment, and the deeper challenge that created that challenge. We are exploring the root source of our chronic personal, social and ecological dis-ease, that has now turned into crisis. Why humanity has created the mess we find ourselves in, and have been in for thousands of years. As we began; the source of problem is not out there, in society, in our relationships, in the environment. The crisis is in each of us, how we perceive, think, feel, how we treat each other and the world. The deeper challenge is inner, a particular misuse of memory, and therefore structure of thought and our identification with this misuse.

The deeper challenge

- The outer society, culture and civilization and our inner self-image or ego are two sides of the same coin. Both sides are mental abstractions or images.
- When attention is focused and identified with these abstractions the resulting enchantment masks our true nature which is transcendent-creation grounded and expressed in nature.
- The implicit disassociation from our true nature this enchantment causes, creates the false appearance that we are separate from nature.
- Falsely believing we are separate from nature predisposes actions and behaviors that create conflicts with our true nature; toxic chemicals and products, pollution, massive amounts of carbon, and many others, that now threaten not only human stability, but all stability of life as we know it.
- The overarching problem appears to be human society, culture, civilization and the self-image or egos that sustain these outer forms. Behind this appearance however, is the deeper and more fundamental source which is a particular structure and function of human thought.
- Down through the ages great efforts have been made to improve or correct the outer expressions noted above, various social reforms, organized religions, theories of psychology, psychoanalysis and therapies, for example. And yet, the overarching problems remain and seem to be compounding exponentially.
- As described by Joseph Chilton Pearce, David Bohm, J. Krishnamurti, Samdhong Rinpoche and others, our failure to recognize and address this deeper source, which has been described as a misuse and false identification with memory, the outward manifestations of this misuse will continue and expand, a pattern that is and has long been unsustainable.
- It has been observed that a problem cannot be solved with the same source that produced the problem. The particular problem is embedded in the source or structure that produced it. More of the same is the same. In our case however, we only know one source, the one that is repeating the old pattern which is now suicidal. Our most pressing challenge is to discover and embody a different quality of mind, one that does not falsely identify with and misuse memory.

Where do we go from here? It is necessary and essential that parents and educators recognize in themselves this misuse and false identification with memory (mental images and conditioning) and model in daily life a quality of thought and action that is not distorted by this misuse. Shuffling more concepts around fails to change the state of the mind, and the real source of the problem is state-specific. Complete mindfulness, to use a Buddhist term, gathering and investing complete attention now negates misuse and its distortions. Right now, this very moment is the only chance we have. J. Krishnamurti addresses this challenge in the simple observation, *The Future is Now*:

> Unless I fundamentally change, the future will be what I am now, right? If I am vicious, cruel, brutal, today, as I have been in the past, I’ll be that way tomorrow too. I can’t get away from it. If I’m quarreling with my wife or husband and so on, I’ll do it tomorrow. So, tomorrow is now. And, to break this chain in which we are caught, there must be a mutation now.

*Krishnamurti, Ojai, Talk 2, 1985*
When considering the enormity of our personal, social and ecological challenges from our misused frame of mind, the future appears grim. Krishnamurti’s insight that the *Future is Now*, changes this. We reincarnate the unsustainable past in the present by our misuse of memory. Each of us continue the destructive pattern by our failure to “know ourselves,” to see what we are actually doing, which brings us to Krishnamurti’s second observation explored the essay *If Not Teaching Then What* and *Media and The Mind;*

*It is the responsibility of each human being to bring about his own transformation, which is not dependent on knowledge or time.*

J. Krishnamurti

Our new future begins the instant we stop reincarnating the old-habit or pattern, which is the source of both, our inner conflicts of self and the outward and expanding chaos in society, culture and the environment. The speaker, as he often referred to himself, often said; *the house is on fire or you are drinking poison.* Will repeating the same pattern change anything? That old pattern must stop before anything new can emerge. As we described, complete attention opens the door.

OK, smarty, how do I, who have lived with this insight for years, apply it in my relationship with Carly Elizabeth? The prerequisite, of course, is wanting and inviting Carly Elizabeth in the first place, that the prenatal experience is well nourished and stress free, that the birth intimate, safe, and free from chemical and technological interventions, that mother, father and extended family appreciate the challenges a new baby bring and care and support each other every day. The nest must be safe, welcoming and nurturing, and yes, I do appreciate that our culture and society, especially in the United States, is dramatically opposed to the creation and support of this safe, nurturing nest. Why on earth would a culture not support this? What diabolical twist of values and logic would do such a thing? And yet, this is the essential foundation, and upon that we:

1. Insure that Carly feels physically and psychologically safe. Fear and insecurity, physically and socially, act like sand in an oyster, with the growth of a protective, defensive, aggressive self-image or ego as a result. Feeling physically and psychologically secure negates this defensive reflex. Another way of saying this is unconditional acceptance wrapped in tons of sincere affection. My emotional state is radiant. Carly is highly attuned to my inner states. Her feelings of safety or threat are most often nonverbal.

2. Practice defensive health nutrition. The synergy of commercial food production, processing, chemical additives, and packaging (BPA), factory farms, the disgusting, inhumane ways we treat our animal cousins, the pollution, toxic chemicals, pesticides, genetically engineered mutations, poisonous air and water, and yes the chronic harm to the immune system caused by untested, more than fifty unproven and therefore unscientific government mandated for profit vaccines, is robbing children of the basic health, vitality and the mental clarity they need to cope. Adding insult to injury, an unprecedented number of children are medicated daily. We protect Carly as much as possible from these dangerous and even life-threatening influences.

3. Attempt to recognize the many ways that cultural images etch and leave their marks on her developing psyche, and protect her from these and/or negate, as much as possible, their influence. When the milk spills I focus on the milk and not who spilled it. To the best of my ability I withhold any form of shame, judgmental comparisons, punishments and by implication rewards, including personal praise; ‘good job.’ When she naturally compares herself with others, not finishing first, for example, I suggest that everyone is different, no one is ever first all the time, or that being first isn’t being your best. Starving the comparing social-image or ego early is like starving a cancer. What remains is much easier to get rid of later. This mindfulness to culturally imposed social images also includes protecting Carly from environments and others who use rewards and punishments, personal judgements, comparisons and shame to control her, traditional schools and organized religions come to mind.
4. Shield and protect Carly from commercial media and screens. At this age and up to age ten or eleven, technology is a curse, not a cure. Many of the most powerful enculturating influences that form the social-ego slip in with commercial media and the internet, with social-media directed at children being the most insidious.

5. In place of exploitative commercial screen-time, including all the plastic and electronic gadgets ‘sold’ as educational, we immerse Carly in descriptive language, as of age two in two languages, with age appropriate non-Disney stories, fables, fairy tales, books like *Little House on the Prairie*, and *Charlotte’s Web*. We read together every day. We share a recycling stacks of books and audio stories in two languages, including National Geographic, books about far off places and ancient cultures. Books, not videos and YouTube, are her windows to the world because we know that descriptive language and story challenge the brain in ways that visual stimulation does not. The ability to play with symbols, words, language and metaphors is the core capacity that makes humans human. The visual system does not open and develop this core capacity. And we need true literacy, a mind that can imagine what wholeness, empathy and creative inner vision looks and feels like to meet the future we have created. This focus extends to ‘open-ended’ toys that change meaning by the way Carly shapes and transforms them, a rich assortment of blocks is a classic example, sand, molding clay, or large cardboard boxes that can be stacked, cut, painted, and rearranged. Real, natural objects and textures. As little plastic and blinking lights as possible.

6. In addition to books, expose Carly to as much live artistic performance as possible, music, dance, and the arts of all kinds, surround her with the tools, supplies, resources and space to explore and express these experiences in her own way at home, at her pace, not ours.

7. A rich extend family of all ages and community, caring adults that know what it means to meet, engage and enchant Carly at her level, not just theirs, and children who can share their inner worlds together as spontaneous, undirected, lightly supervised and supported free play.

8. Realize the age and stage specific world or reality that Carly is in and adapt my interactions to meet her needs at this critical time. The majority of Carly’s protective-defensive responses, that calcify as ego, are in reaction to conflicts that we adults create and impose by not being attuned to her age, stage and stage-specific needs. Then, of course, we blame her for the conflict and repeat this daily.

9. Appreciate, even up to age five and six, that the primary influences that shape her self-world view are nonverbal. I communicate, as much as possible, through touch and gesture, leaving verbal explanations as brief as possible.

10. Understand that Carly’s reality is different from my own. She is still a *child of the dream*, where distinctions between the outer word and her inner experience is blurred. I appreciate that it takes her more time than adults to shift from one activity to the next. We think the child is being lazy. Inner states at this age dissolve slowly. By giving her more time I eliminate most of the conflicts that normally occur. When challenges do occur, and they do, redirect attention to a playful scenario, one that deemphasize Carly as the object or focus of failure, wrong doing or distress. Let playing together or story resolve the conflict rather than blame, threat and shame. Less conflicts, less defense, less ego later. At least, that’s the intent.

Being sensitive in these interdependent ways changes, and profoundly, the messages Carly responds to as she interacts with life. Recall, the social-image of ego is a coping pattern developed to navigate the threats that culture imposes in its relentless attempts to manipulate, modify and control behavior. As Carly’s body, brain and emotions continue to expand, so too will our response. Her ever-changing nature demands an ever-changing response.

Imagine what it might feel like to never feel ashamed, embarrassed, judged, compared, threatened or punished. How is it possible to give compete attention, the hallmark of optimum performance and learning at any age, stage or activity, if one must defend against all these threats all the time? Providing
Carly the safety, and therefore freedom, to give complete attention expands her potential, and exponentially. Joseph Chilton Pearce was fond of saying; a child never restrained, never needs restraint. Now you understand why. Threat of any kind demands an equal amount of attention be diverted into defense. Culture, being the dominate threat, acts like a vaccine, injecting a cultural self-image into the body and psyche as a coping defensive shield. The greater the threat, the greater the egotistical image. The safety to invest complete attention in learning, which to the child is play, negates culture and the internal image.

The Wild Card
Just as the generic structure has built in wild cards that change expression in response to environmental signals, child and human development must do the same. What prevents this is culture. Everything we have explored rests on the simple insight that cultural conditioning, as identity, is fundamentally conservative, limited and exclusive, rather than open-ended and inclusive. When this insight is applied to human development it becomes clear that culture is, by design, anti-development. Culture and the mental states that reincarnate culture limits and constrains, prevents and punishes much more than it invites, opens, develops and expands human potential.

Technology has and will continue to develop. We can travel into space and manipulate genes, but inwardly we have remained more or less stagnate for thousands of years. Culture as an internal state of mind imposes a strict set of conservative limits on each succeeding generation, which excludes innate states of perception and possibilities that remain dormant, unexplored and undeveloped. Fire-walking, spoon bending, savant-like flashes of insight, direct knowing, distant healing and telepathy are all proven capacities, beyond any doubt, not to mention empathy, altruism, visionary creativity and compassion. What these and other capacities point to are potentials that are repressed, dismissed and excluded by the implicitly self-centered states of body and mind that express as society and culture. Breaking our mistaken identification with selfish-culture, open you and me, and more importantly our children, to the rediscovery and re-identification with our true nature, which is transcendent and interdependent nature. This discovery breaks the limitations and constraints that have trapped human consciousness for thousands of years. And this rediscovery opens the doors to the many states of perception, knowing and relationships that have been excluded by our false identification with culture.

The intellect is a magnificent accomplishment but it remains an extremely limited form of intelligence. A keen and well developed intellect is critical, in the service, not of its own conditioned and therefore limited process, rather as the servant of the infinitely larger intelligence we call life. The enculturated self, by its defensive nature, is abstracted and disassociated from this larger intelligence and we see the result; constant wars, pollution, egos exploiting egos at every turn, environmental and species collapse. This is what a dissociated ego as intellect, as culture does. More of the same is suicidal. As David Bohm described, existing knowledge cannot solve the problem. Something much deeper is needed. A completely new approach.

To frame this new approach deeply, fundamentally, what each of the teachers that have inspired this rant imply, is that this something new is not an another concept, rather it is a new state of the mind. Recall, ‘form is content’. The form or structure of the public schools is the primary content experienced in that structure. The form or structure of Television and the internet determine what kind of experience is delivered using that form. The same is true of the mind. The state of the mind determines its content. The state that produces concepts remains the same regardless of the concepts it creates. The much deeper approach that Bohm describes is in the state of the mind, not its content as concepts. Also implied is that the mind that creates conditioned images and concepts excludes or fails to contain perceptions and capacities that are not concepts. One state excludes others.

Implicit in all we have explored is a realization and invitation for, from our enculturated perspective, non-ordinary states to be included, rather than excluded, in the normal and whole development of children. Just maybe, the states of perception and capacities that have been repressed, excluded and dismissed by self-as-culture, will provide the answers we need to reincarnate humanity in a new and fundamentally different way.
Our approach therefore, is twofold; first, to break the false enchantment and identification with the habitual state of mind that creates and sustains culture and its inner twin, self-as-culture, and second, from this new state of being and implicit identity, discover or rediscover, develop and apply new states of being and relationship that return the human brain and its function to its natural order. In other words, to recognize and invite the miraculous.
Epilogue: The Vast, Empty, Sky-Like Nature of Our Mind

If the example our behavior exhibits today was the template that would imprint how the next generation, and therefore the future of humanity, would behave, what would you do differently? What will make us change and what kind of change will actually make the difference we urgently need? Just today, November 26, 2019 another extinction report filled the headlines:

Why You Should Care About the Current Wave of Mass Extinctions
Yes, the extinction crisis we are witnessing is only the beginning of a wave of mass ecocide of non-human life on Earth, a process that could wipe out a million species of plants and animals from our planet in the short term (read: decades). About 15 thousand scientific studies (!) support this terrifying conclusion, as it can be read in the assessment report produced by the independent UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

What we are witnessing today is just the final stage of a process that began about 70 thousand years ago, when some unknown change in the neural wiring of human brains unleashed the so-called “cognitive revolution...” Thanks to its unmatched communication and organizational skills, Homo sapiens set out to colonize and invade the entire planet, causing the annihilation of other species — often on such a grand scale that it [Sapiens] became the #1 Ecological Serial Killer of the Planet.

With the advent of agriculture and monotheistic religions some 10 thousand years ago, the anthropocentric view of the planet was sacralized (made sacred) and institutionalized: since then we have convinced ourselves that we are not part of nature anymore, we are of a superior level; and that animals and plants were created for our own use and consumption.

In brief, there have been three pulses of ecocides directly caused by the sapiens’ inexorable expansion: the first provoked by hunter-gatherers during the epic process of colonizing the entire planet on foot and through sea vessels; the second prompted by agriculture; and the third being the current one we are living through right now. As a result, while 10 thousand years ago wildlife was 99 percent of the whole planet’s biomass, today it is only 1 percent; the rest being humans and their “commodity” domestic animals and plants. The problem is that we are now under a UN ultimatum: Just last year, top scientists informed us that we are left with another 12 years if we are to avoid a climate catastrophe on the planet.

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Is there any question that our uniquely human “cognitive revolution” is at the center of our looming catastrophe? This is precisely what we have been exploring in Where do we go from here? As Dr. Serra notes; we have convinced ourselves that we are not part of nature anymore, that we are of a superior level; and that animals and plants were created for our own use and consumption. The simple fact is; we are nature but we think we are not. The word that best describes this is delusional:

[dih-loo-zuh-nl] adjective
Having false or unrealistic beliefs or opinions

Maintaining fixed false beliefs even when confronted with facts, usually as a result of mental illness

Something took place at the very root of the “cognitive revolution,’ that brought us the crisis we now face. We began to misuse our amazing capacity to imagine. We reified the images we created, meaning we began treating our abstractions as real things, independent from the creative process of thought, and forgot we were doing this. A delusion is playing a trick on ourselves, like a magician, and not realizing that we are doing it.

The falseness that can creep into the play of thought is shown in the etymology of the words illusion, delusion, and collusion, all of which have as their Latin root ludere, “to play.” Illusion implies playing false with perception; delusion, playing false with thought; and collusion, playing false together in order to support each other’s illusion and delusions.
Compounding the trick ‘playing falsely’ with our capacity to imagine, the process becomes automatic. We normalize the trick which then permeates everything we do.

We can understand thought as a conditioned reflex. Take, for example, Pavlov and his dog. The dog has a natural reflex; it salivates when it sees food. If you ring a bell every time it sees food, the dog will associate the bell with the memory of perceiving food. Eventually it will skip the stage of perceiving food and salivate when the bell rings. I suggest that thought works in a similar way.

We don't really understand the nature of our thought process; we're not aware of how it works and how it's really disrupting, not only our society and our individual lives but also the way the brain and nervous system operate, making us unhealthy or perhaps even someway damaging the system.

To center our thought on something illusory, which is assumed to have supreme importance, is going to disrupt the whole process and it will not only make thought about yourself wrong, it will make thought about everything wrong so that thought becomes a dangerous and destructive instrument all around.

*When thinking and thought become more and more automatic perception becomes less and less intelligent.*

I am suggesting that the very means by which we try to solve our problems is the problem. The source of our problems is within the structure of thought itself.

If, as David suggests, our misuse of memory makes what we think about ourselves wrong, it will make what we think about culture wrong and even what we think about our life and death wrong.

We have made life into a hideous thing. Life has become a battle, which is an obvious fact, constant fight, fight, fight. We have divorced that living from death. We separate death as something horrible, something to be frightened about. And to us this living, which is misery, we accept. If we didn’t accept this existence as misery, then life and death are the same movement. Like love, death, and living are one. One must totally die to know what love is. And to go into this question of what is death, what lies beyond death, whether there is reincarnation, whether there is resurrection; all that, becomes rather meaningless if you do not know how to live. If you, the human being, knows how to live, in this world, without conflict, then death has quite a different meaning.

*J. Krishnamurti*  
*Australian Broadcasting Company, 1970*

We live in an abstracted virtual-reality that we mistake for reality. This predisposition is so common that we don’t consider this delusional; rather, we believe that our lack of sanity is sanity and anyone who disagrees with us must be crazy. The world is on fire, we nod, and go about our business as if it really doesn’t matter. We are so absorbed in our self-generated images that we fail to notice or experience the mind in which all these images are floating. On critical examination there is a present flash of memory exploding, like a firework, in the vast empty sky we call mind, and then another flash, and another. We think we are the images created by these explosions. Perhaps it is more accurate to describe our true nature as the empty sky in which these exploding images happen. Thoughts and mental images, all the memories we accumulate, are like clouds appearing and disappearing in this vast, borderless sky-like mind or pure awareness. When the clouds evaporate, who and what we really are remains.

People much wiser than I are quite certain that this essence, this subtle energy or consciousness, isn’t material. This subtle force is not generated by the body, rather somehow infuses the body. The insight that we are the sky and not the clouds alters, and fundamentally, how the river of interdependent forces express moment by moment as our life. And perhaps more deeply, more fundamentally, this sky-like
pure attention and awareness may be beyond death as we envision it from our limited, conditioned point of view.

When we look at death from within the conditioned, relative-reality thought creates, death is indeed frightening. When we look at death from our true nature, which I imagine as pure energy and attention, now completely free from all the images that thought creates, what is there to fear? With that realization we become empty of fear, fearless. Identification with the clouds that autobiographical memory create is the source of most of our fears. Identify with the sky-like nature of pure awareness and that fear does not exist. This includes, of course, our fear of the mystery we call death.

As a paper bag cannot catch the wind, our limited, conditioned, thought-based conditioning is incapable of holding the infinite sky-like mind our thoughts and fears appear and disappear in. This realization of our true nature dissolves the self-centered ego as we known it, time disappears and we are planted firmly, here, now, in the eternal present – except when another thought catches our attention and whisks us away into another virtual-reality. Then, like Rip Van Winkle sobering up we say; “Ah, yes, here we are again, awake from the dream.”

It takes a quality of attention that is not enchanted to see the trick we are playing. Unless we get this straight, everything we do will be infected and warped by the trick. Very simply, enchantment in our self-generated virtual reality is so complete that there remains very little or no attention to experience the natural-order-of-the-mind, to use a David Bohm phrase, our vast sky-like nature with its unlimited intelligence and awareness. Waking up from the dream we discover that we are not the dream. Contrary to appearances, we discover that we are never, ever the same, not for a fraction of a second. As the movement of water creates the form we call a river, the form we call me is created by the constant movement of interdependent forces, what Buddhists call interdependent originations.

Interdependent origination (Sanskrit, pratityasamutpada) is the law of causality. Nothing has independent, permanent, or absolute existence. Everything is part of a limitless web of interconnections that undergoes a continual process of transformation. Every appearance arises from complex causes and conditions, and in turn combines with others to produce countless effects. By understanding the causal chain, the course of existence can be altered by eliminating their causes.

Whatever there might be beyond this form, created by the movement of countless interdependent forces, I doubt if it places great importance on the scrapbook we call personal memories, what we think we are. Assuming there is a soul, a birth-less and death-less essence that abides, I place my bets on the sky-like nature of pure attention and awareness, and not my petty judgements and prejudices that float like clouds in that sky. What ends with physical death is our embedment, identification and near compete enchantment with the clouds, not the sky.

In my discussions with Samdhong Rinpoche, a scholar and trusted colleague of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, whose tradition has looked at the nature of these subtle states perhaps more rationally than any other culture, he describes a curious probability; all of us share the same vast sky-like essence, and yet, simultaneously, we retain that unique quality of ‘Michael-ness,” which I assume is the hidden magic that DNA holds as it migrates, protected by its seed-shell, the physical body, from generation to generation.

Well now, that certainly changes the meaning of death. The body is a seed-shell carrying DNA from body to body, retaining its sky-like essence and also adapting the seed-shell to survive and thrive in the present environment. Rather than personal salvation, our focus becomes: what are the specific qualities and capacities that will enable our seed-shell to sprout and blossom fully in the current environment, because survival of DNA depends on that, not our social identity. And each of us share this most fundamental responsibility, which translates directly into the model we offer to our children, who, with their absorbent mind, become that model with unquestioned acceptance.

With this in mind, it becomes obvious that the living environment, where water and the oceans is our bloodstream and the sky our breath, is being choked, clogged and poisoned by each new human being purchasing and dumping a lifetime of plastic soap containers, packaging for literally billions of items that themselves are toxic, demanding that millions of tons of poisonous chemicals be poured and sprayed
over the soil, year after year. The living biosphere cannot sustain more of the same, the continued expansion of human population. We are, as you know, at the tipping point, and have been for decades.

Reducing human population is not an option. Depopulation has officially been on the books since December 1974 with Kissinger’s classified National Security Study Memorandum, NSSM 200, Implications of Worldwide Population Growth, For U.S. Security and Overseas Interests - the World Health Organization, UN and US Government agreed on the need for massive population reduction and Kissinger had a plan: Create Conditions for Fertility Decline, and Research to Improve Fertility Control Technology. This was followed by the Carter Report 2000 and other more contemporary resolutions.

Create Conditions for Fertility Decline, and Research to Improve Fertility Control Technology describes fairly accurately what Monsanto’s Roundup, a broad-spectrum glyphosate-based herbicide, is designed to do. The world is awash in glyphosate. It has become the most heavily-used agricultural chemical in the history of the world. A study in the journal Environmental Sciences Europe published in 2016 reveals that Americans have applied 1.8 million tons of glyphosate since its introduction in 1974 (The same year as Kissinger’s National Security Study Memorandum.) Worldwide, 9.4 million tons of the chemical have been sprayed onto the world’s fields. The basic function of glyphosate is to interfere with reproduction.

A study published in the Journal of Toxicology in Vitro found that, even at very low levels, Monsanto's Roundup destroys testosterone and ultimately leads to male infertility. The findings add to the more than 25 other diseases known to be linked to Roundup, which include DNA damage, birth defects, liver dysfunction, and cancer. One part per million (ppm) to 10,000 ppm revealed undeniable cell toxicity caused by Roundup.

Glyphosate is only one of the Fertility Control Technologies. Dr. Ignacio Chapela, a University of California microbiologist, discovered that wild corn in remote parts of Mexico is contaminated with lab altered DNA (GMO). Chapela revealed that a spermicidal corn developed by a U.S. company is now being tested in Mexico. Males who unknowingly eat the corn produce non-viable sperm and are unable to reproduce. Chapela described how spermicide could easily end up in your cornflakes. In the future, I suspect the mad rush for global mandatory vaccinations and genetically modified foods will be included in a depopulation agenda. http://www.metroactive.com/bohemian/10.06.10/greenzone-1040.html

Why touch on depopulation? Well, it is a soft way to open our hearts and minds to increasing possibility of species extinction, something my daughter Carly Elizabeth will face. The glaciers are melting, methane is bubbling in Siberia, Venice is flooded, the plastic continents the size of Texas floating in the ocean are getting bigger, both of them. Today, November 25, 2019, researchers say: The concentration of carbon dioxide in Earth’s atmosphere has reached a record high, according to a report released Monday by the World Meteorological Organization. “There is no sign of a slowdown, let alone a decline, in greenhouse gases concentration... Our bodies are marinating in 9.4 million tons of Roundup by design. Mandatory vaccines are trampling the Nuremberg Code of Ethics. We are faced with continued corporate, political and media denial that Climate Change even exists.

Depopulation by 50% to 90%, as some recommend, implies some hope for repopulation. Extinction is the end. What kind of life will Carly, now five-years-old, have facing all this and much more? According to top scientists we have ten years to turn this around if we are going to avoid climate catastrophe.

How do I model a state of being that will awaken and expand in her the capacity to live a full, authentic, even miraculous human life, full of beauty and passion, to break the destructive spell we call Civilization and rediscover who and what she really is – transcendent-nature, and by so doing tip the scales from death back to life in this next, most threatened generation ever?

The End Game

Realizing there exists this vast, intelligent sky-like nature of the mind that remains hidden by the self-generated clouds compulsive thoughts produce, we discover that our identification with the clouds is a distraction, like mental fog or smog that prevents our direct experience of the ecstasy, beauty and
miraculous gift this unique human experience - is. Our astonishing capacity to imagine is a critical part of this gift, one that nature invested billions of years to experience, but one that we have failed to understand and master. As David Bohm, Krishnamurti, Joseph Chilton Pearce and others have shared; because we don’t really know ourselves, how thought and memory function, we lose track of what we are imagining and misuse this capacity in disastrous ways. The Sorcerer’s Apprentice, absentminded wizard or Victor Frankenstein come to mind, casting spells that turnout upside down. In truth, we are the cause of our problems and our wondrous technologies, being grounded in this misuse, only compound our deepening crisis.

Realizing and identifying with the vast, sky like nature of the mind renders imagination a tool rather than the source of action and relationship. As it is, we assume that the tool, a hammer for example, is intelligent source that defines who we are and how we behave. And what do we do? Hammer everything, which is what we have been doing for centuries.

The way out of this frightening, even suicidal house of mirrors is to turn on the light of attention and discovery that we have created all those scary images we see in the mirrors. Cultivating a quality of attention that is not completely under the spell we weave is the first and most essential step. This freedom from identifying with the known, a Krishnamurti phrase, invites patterns of perceptions, insights, qualities of relationship, along with causal-creative states that have been hidden and excluded by this conditioning.

The challenge we face is understanding the double-edge nature of imagination. Using it one way will kill us. Using it another will save us. To be fully human is to discover, unfold and develop imagination. But, as David Orr notes, it is not imagination but imagination of a certain kind that we need. We must find ways to awaken awareness of the true, sky-like nature of the human mind, with its vast intelligence, in ourselves and in our children. Imagination is necessary to do that, but we must go much further. You and I must lift our attention out of the dark and scary swamp that Fox Not-News, Facebook, Twitter and even the deep conditioning we experience in most schools, so called religious, political and nationalistic conditioning. Only by being free ourselves can we nurture that freedom in our children. Lifting our awareness, and therefore our identity out of the swamp called culture nudges us closer to the realization of what the Buddhist tradition calls our true Buddha nature.

When we say Buddha, we naturally think of the Indian prince Gautama Siddhartha who reached enlightenment in the sixth century B.C., and who taught the spiritual path followed by millions all over Asia, known today as Buddhism. Buddha, however, has a much deeper meaning. It means a person, any person, who has completely awakened from ignorance and opened to his or her vast potential of wisdom. A Buddha is one who has brought a final end to suffering and frustration, and discovered a lasting and deathless happiness and peace.

Our true nature could be compared to the sky, and the confusion of the ordinary mind to clouds. Some days the sky is completely obscured by clouds. We should always try and remember: the clouds are not the sky, and do not “belong” to it. They only hang there and pass by in their slightly ridiculous and non-dependent fashion. And they can never stain or mark the sky in any way.

So, where exactly is this Buddha nature? It is in the sky-like nature of our mind. Utterly open, free, and limitless, it is fun, so simple and so natural that it can never be complicated, corrupted, or stained, so pure that it is beyond even the concept of purity and impurity.

To talk of this nature of mind as sky-like, of course, is only a metaphor that helps us to begin to imagine it’s all embracing boundlessness; for the Buddha nature has a quality the sky cannot have, that of the radiant clarity of awareness. As it is said: It is simply your flawless, present awareness, cognizant and empty, naked and awake.

Sogyal Rinpoche
The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying
First we need to open, develop and expand the capacity to imagine in every child, and as we do, help our children realize that this powerful capacity is a tool and not the master or intelligence. We must model ways that awaken a deep knowing that we are not what we think we are, that we embody the infinitely vast force that created the universe and all of nature, not as an idea or another concept, but as a direct experience, and let this deep knowing guide us that enhance the wellbeing of every living thing. Pure attention, not another concept, opens the door.
Postscript: How?

I would like you to write a list of simple suggestions of how an individual, parent, educator, practitioner could make changes to turn the trends you are talking about. Thanks. Helen

We begin by discovering that our conditioning, as parents and educators, is the greatest source of harm. We are the enemy. We must be free if our children are to be free. Our challenge is to see very clearly that our reality and identity is not grounded in our authentic nature, which is nature, with its implicit immeasurable creative intelligence. The explosive power of our imagination as concept, culture and identity dominates our consciousness. The constant threats imposed by culture create an internal-mirror image of that threat as a defense, the social ego. So pervasive is this threat and response dynamic that very early we falsely assume that the inner-defensive is an independent reality. We falsely believe that this defensive image is who and what we are, rather than identifying with our true nature, which is creative intelligence, empathic appropriateness and transcendence.

We mistake our explosive self-generated mental images for intelligence, when deeper, critical attention reveals that intellect is merely a tool and not intelligence at all. So pervasive is this conditioning that we, the enculturated species that we have become, are completely blind to our true nature. This fatal mistaken identity and misuse of imagination now threatens stability and survival of most life forms on earth. This challenge must be seen directly, immediately, not simply as another concept.

In the present moment, free of conditioned thought with its images, open and sensitive, the wisdom and intelligence that has imprinted and embodied life is there. When the baby cries we respond, not with Dr. Spock or the Bible, ‘spare the rod, spoil the child,’ which is conditioning, clouds in the sky that block the light of millions of years of empathic appropriateness. When the baby cries because of fear or pain, the most direct and appropriate response is to pick the baby up, knowing that affectionate human touch pushes away fear, soothes the pain. One state negates the other. If Spock, some book or concept fills the mind, some formula or rule, we cannot see the baby. We see and respond to the concept and not the baby. Is there any doubt, repeating this, century after century, why we have become so violent and destructive, to ourselves and everything else?

Ultimately, there is no how, no rules or formula needed to access this sensitive, appropriate intelligence that we actually are. Imagine if you needed a concept to take a breath. Thought and concepts block and prevent the flowering of goodness, to use Krishnamurti’s phrase. Direct empathic insight-action worked fine for millions of years, that is, until we buried the light of this deep intelligence in culture, civilization and technologies. Today, navigating the dangers that culture represents, takes more than empty innocence. So, we invent concepts and practices, create habits that counter the negative reflexes that our deep conditioning imposes. Being completely submerged in culture and concepts we turn to culture and concepts to free ourselves from culture and concepts.

OK, we need to start someplace. The first requisite is, do no harm. From our essay; Why go to school, the meaning of education?

Creating an atmosphere in which there is no fear requires a great deal of thinking on everyone’s part; the child, student, parent and educator. No fear physically is fairly obvious; no bullying, no corporal punishments, no spanking, no isolation as in time out, etc. No fear psychologically is another matter; no comparison, which includes grades, no rewards, which include praise and threats of punishment, no humiliation, no shame, no ‘I told you so,’ no, ‘how many times do I have to tell you,’ no, ‘look what you did, or did not do.’ In all these, and many other ways, culture implants deeply, and very early, the seeds of our psychological mask, our coping pattern, our self-image or ego. First things first. When the milk spills attention is focused on the milk, not who tipped it over.

We become sensitive and aware of all the ways that culture creates and feeds the social image or ego with its comparisons, judgements, punishments and rewards, and, with care and attention, negate these powerful forces, these knee-jerk conditioned reflexes from damaging the natural order and intelligence of our child’s new developing brain and mind.
Understanding that compulsory schooling, technology and media are powerful agents of culture, we protect our children from being infected by these forces until they have the capacity to recognize these seductive dangers themselves, age eleven or twelve. We protect the physical body from environmental toxins, including fake, processed food, GMOs, hidden sugar, poisoned water, over prescribed pharmaceuticals and, yes, we protect our children from growing list of government mandated vaccines. All of this is simply doing no harm, which in practice changes in scope and our behavior as the child moves through various ages and stages of development.

We find a child not distracted and damaged by identifying with all the threats and comparisons that cultural conditioning imposes through church, compulsory schooling and all the cultural counterfeits found in exploitive corporate media, that they retain their astonishing capacity to gather and focus complete attention in continued and expansive learning called original play. This play encompasses language, literacy and inventive story beginning at age two which continues to grow and expand naturally, opening the child to the amazing world of books, and the qualities of mind that books develop, all spontaneously if give appropriate adult models.

As the capacity for abstract thinking develops, beginning around age five, but most certainly by six, seven and eight in an undamaged child, we help them understand and negate all the false social-images and their behaviors that culture has imprinted in that child and in the children and adults they encounter. Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication comes to mind, seeing and responding to the feelings and needs behind the social mask. And this negating of the false images and strong emotions we have about ourselves and others, continues to grow in importance during adolescence. Imagine not being seduced by all these zombie social-images during this critical period of metamorphosis, now projected directly into the brains of our teens by social media, how preventing this will protect the natural order of the human mind from these incestuous mental worms. Imagine all the energy and attention that will be conserved, freed to be directed into empathic wholeness and wellbeing as nature designed. In this way we redirect the powerful period called adolescence into the service of light and wholeness rather than darkness, depression and despair, with suicide now being the prime cause of death for young people.

By the late-teens and early-twenties, a body and mind free from the vampires of culture will not be attracted to the zombie-personalities who inhabit what Buddhists call the *Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, the realm that our counterfeit culture lives in. Being free from the spell that created these zombie-personalities, the natural order of the heart and mind will attract and be attracted to light, not darkness. Thought and knowledge are seen as the tools they are, rather than being agents for social comparison and pecking order. Their energies and attention, being free from the addiction that empty-identities crave, will naturally move in ways that increase the light and new possibilities that they see, for they embody and live in a completely different reality, finally free from the spell that has endarkened the human mind for centuries.

Am I suggesting that all rules, limitations and constraints imposed by culture are wrong or evil, that we should not be educated or use technologies? Not at all. By what standard or value do we discriminate between stopping at red and going at green, and the holocaust or forced mandatory vaccinations or sterilization without informed consent? It is argued that these measures are practical and necessary for the wellbeing of culture. Marinating in culture for centuries renders us so conditioned that we can hardly imagine a form of intelligence that is free of enucleation; nationalism, racism, sexism, and many other isms, for example. Cultures, including compulsory education and organized religions, are fundamentally conservative. They enforce strict codes of allegiance and conduct. Self-actualization, as I and my teachers have suggested, is sacrificed for the disembodied, abstracted greater-good. This sacrificing, limiting and constraining of individual human potential is anti-nature, anti-design.

Implied in this collection of essays is an urgent need to identify more deeply with our authentic nature, and from this, watch a new culture emerge. Doing so threatens the dominate self-centered basis of culture as we know it, a force that will do everything possible to repress the emergence of another foundation for culture.
In there lies the Rub, a Rub being a hidden dagger in Shakespeare’s time, and our real challenge. Ideally culture, being grounded in nurture, would support and enhance its essence, which is transcendent self-actualization, based on empathic cooperation, not in trampling and enslaving other species and resources as sapiens have done selfishly for millennia.

This new reality can only come into being when sufficient energy and attention is free from seductive images that culture continually spews, like hypnotic smog. The prerequisite is for parents and adults to gather a sliver of attention that is not infected so they discover in themselves the profound distinction between an enchanted mind and a mind free from enchantment. Once this insight unfolds, we have a new reference and can return to the embodied experience of a state of mind and heart that is free. Instead of culture conditioning as thought being our default state, the embodied experience of a state of mind and heart that is free becomes the norm. Now, we have a carabineer, a secure starting place, to climb Mt. Everest, the perennial reawakening from the dream-clouds that block the light that we are. In this sense, we and our children begin the journey of Always Awakening. And with that awakening a new reality and culture is born.

Photo: John-Michael Mendizza

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Michael is an entrepreneur, author, educator, documentary filmmaker and founder of Touch the Future, focusing on optimizing human potential beginning with the parent-child relationship. Michael’s close friendship and mentor relationship with Joseph Chilton Pearce began in the early 1990’s He is the author of six books; Magical Parent-Magical Child, the Art of Joyful Parenting, co-authored with Joseph Chilton Pearce, applying what athletes call The Zone to parenting and to education, Playful Wisdom, exploring the critical role fathers play during the early and explosive first two years of a child’s life, Always Awakening: Buddha’s Realization Krishnamurti’s Insight with Rinpoche Samdhong, the first Prime Minister of Tibet in Exile, Flowering, a collection of dramatic floral and seascape images with quotes by Krishnamurti. Astonishing Capacities and Self-inflicted Limitations, a summary-anthology of Joseph Chilton Pearce’s collected insights and Unconditionally Free, the life and collected insights of J. Krishnamurti. Michael and his wife share ZFolio; two galleries, Solvang, Monterey, California, that feature international designer jewelry, Czech Art Glass and Michael’s photography, The Solvang Olive Press featuring the highest standards for Extra Virgin Olive Oil in the world plus Balsamic from Modena, Italy, and Solvang Flavors, a healthy artesian Café, Crêperie and Italian Gelateria.