



5-1-1993

## Education: Cultural enterprise and spiritual activity

E. Neill

*Queensland University of Technology*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Neill, E. (1993). Neill, E. (1993). Education: Cultural enterprise and spiritual activity. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 12(2), 1–8.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 12 (2). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies/vol12/iss2/2>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals and Newsletters at Digital Commons @ CIIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CIIS. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@ciis.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@ciis.edu).

## **EDUCATION: CULTURAL ENTERPRISE AND SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY**

**E. NEILL**  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
BRISBANE  
AUSTRALIA

### **The Mystery of Education**

At the heart of education there reside mysterious elements (Harris, 1988, p.19). One can say this because these same elements of mystery reside at the heart of our existence as human beings:

A mystery...surrounds and encompasses me. It is something 'in which I find myself caught up'... (Harris, 1988, p.13).

So, to teach and learn about life in a meaningful way, we are committed to entering the unknown.

### **The 'Why' of Living**

This is really no foreign task as psychologists have commonly agreed that human beings are born with the desire to find out, to discover the unknown. They need to progressively perceive more clearly and believe more certainly that there is something important for them to know and to do for the purposeful living of their lives. This is the Genius to which we are called.

...little is to be expected of that day, if it is to be called a day, to which we are not awakened by our Genius...to a higher life than we fell asleep from;  
....Morning is awake and there is a dawn in me (Thoreau, 1908, p.77).

So important is this need for meaning and commitment in life that

He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.

Friedrich Nietzsche

In effect, human beings are born with the desire to be educated in the meaning of life for them. Each of us has a pressing educational urge to formulate satisfying answers to critical questions about the nature of our being and to determine the characteristics of authentic existence. To satisfy these needs, one must be prepared to venture into the mystery of one's self.

## Finding Myself

Peering into my secret chamber.....  
The inner me is masked away,  
Through the deepness of my soul  
Concealed within my own walls -----  
Me in here, and you out there  
Perplexity - engraved in my spirit.....

Tania Beck  
Age 12 years

Some sociologists of education would argue that there is really no mystery in the discovery of one's self as we are all products of genetics and/or our social environment and we're moved by ideology. All answers about one's self are therefore obtained from rationally analysing these forces, and formulating explanatory theory, then the future can be systematically planned towards ideologically determined goals.

Krishnamurti (195, p.23) warns against this. "The right kind of education is not concerned with any (one) ideology, however much it may promise a future Utopia: it is not based on any system, however carefully thought out; nor is it a means of conditioning the individual in some special manner". The implication here is that freedom of exploration is a vital element of education.

As things stand, education aims to define us and our social activity, restricting explanatory possibilities to race, gender and ethnicity. "The entire system of public instruction...is best regarded as a mechanism for perpetuating, and profiting from, human immaturity, by censoring, often by habitual self-censorship, the identification and exploration of the antithetical possibility...." (Ogilvie, 1993, p.11).

However no racial 'family tree' or social analysis of one's environment can explain and dispel the strong sense of "self" and "not self", of being alien in one's environment, which still leaves us dissatisfied. We feel the need to seek beyond the narrow, isolated personal identity society has encouraged us to construct, and look for an "antithetical possibility".

My mind  
winding and winding  
- in tangling confusion  
knotted in intertwining thoughts  
Unending frustration  
As I seek beyond my limit  
For the origin of my self being.

Niki Medcraft  
Age 12 years

This unconscious yet powerful commitment to another broader heritage is our stimulus for discovery.

### Psychological Hinderances

However, in order to be free to consider the nature of the undefined, we need to overcome the psychological hinderances. These mental constructs, pleasant and

unpleasant, have been designed and shaped in a social system that dominates our life.

### The Satchel

Mysterious contents  
lure me  
What are its secrets?  
I'll explore...  
My hand  
Enveloped by darkness  
Brings forward an item  
to the light.  
I inspect....  
Ceramic ornaments  
Filling me with delight.  
Ugly artefacts  
And I gasp with horror.  
These are the handcrafts  
of my mind.

Dana Sanders  
Age 12 years

### Revelation and Release

When we realize that we have participated in the creation (albeit unwittingly) of our mental contents, and that their continuing existence depends on us, their controlling power over us diminishes. Then our inborn desire and ability to engage in unhampered creative exploration of being, regains its momentum.

The human being is made for  
creative transformation as a bird  
is made for flight. To be sure,  
each of us is in a cage much of  
the time. We long for the door  
to be opened that we may be free  
to soar into the heavens (Birch, 1990, p.5).

### The Exploration

#### Awareness

In suspended animation  
my soul waits  
.....for the time of truth

Speedily my mind shoots higher  
and higher!  
.....Exhausted.....it floats.....  
Re-energized it pierces  
the blackness!

Searching  
for its destiny.....  
infinity.....

Dana Sanders  
Age 12 years

Wilber (1983, p.94) describes the escape from social 'truth'.  
"....(C)onsciousness, in a rapid ascent, is differentiating itself entirely from the ordinary mind and self...." It is "following a path of transformation-upward which leads beyond the gross body-mind and merely rational ego".

### Mystical Union

Does the flight from everyday reality result in illumination that fulfills our hopes and wins our life commitment? Once again there are many who believe that there is nothing which can generate purpose or meaning except the socially constructed parameters of knowledge which define us and our universe. For them any search beyond these parameters for a broader understanding of one's existence is fruitless and indeed ludicrous.

Others paradoxically find here in the undefinable the source of answers to their questions of meaningful relationships and purpose in the universe. For them, Bateson's question has been the crucial one.

What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the  
orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me?  
And me to you (Capra, 1988, p.77)?

Physicalists give a rational, physicalist answer, couched in terms of atoms and basic matter, and one would acknowledge their correctness up to a point.

However, the psychiatrist Dean, who is a pioneer in metaphysics, describes the experience of a much more inclusive form of inter-connectedness.

An intellectual illumination occurs that is quite impossible  
to describe. In an intuitive flash, one has an awareness of  
the meaning and drift of the universe, an identification and  
merging with creation, infinity and immortality....  
(Wilber, 1983, p.93).

If one can remember this "cosmic presence" (Heron, 1992, pp.10,11), which is usually obscured by the illusions of the ego, one will have the following answer to Bateson's question of interconnectedness:

In Reality there is no separation between  
any conscious centre and its setting in  
universal mind....The isolation and alienation  
of the human mind is an egoic illusion....Dismantling  
that illusion means that personal consciousness  
uncovers its true heritage - that it is both distinct within, and one  
with, a universal presence (Heron, 1990, p.10).

## Human Being as Mystic

Stace (1960, p.14) calls this awareness "of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things", mysticism. The mystics' "passion is satisfied only with the sense of the Ultimate Reality...Godhead or God-ness that is back of the world of mind and nature" (Blakney, 1955, p.29).

### Paradise Dreaming

A feeling of real creation,  
Surely nobody can explain this .  
A delicate smell wafts across the valley.  
Choirs of birds sing a preacher's hymn  
A blanket of green I lie on....and watch.  
Sand and earth glisten on a beam of sunlight  
Water runs....Mill pond smooth  
Resting.....Peacefully  
This is unity.

Peter Yates  
Age 12 years

Because of these insights, they come to "regard certain aspects of their perceptions of who they are, of what the world is, and of what society is as inauthentic" (Grof in Capra, 1988, pp.108,9).

To "Know" means  
to escape this life.

Steven Marsden  
Age 13 years

They see these perceptions for what they are "direct derivatives of childhood experiences,...comments on their individual history" (Grof in Capra, 1988, pp.108,9).

### The Purpose - To Love and Be Loved

What life purpose or commitment develops for the human being when s/he is aware that human beings are an expression of Spirit differentiated as Many? Heron (1992, p.201) believes that there are two interdependent and complementary paths for such persons....". The first he calls "the path of transcendence". It is an opening to the One, to what we call God.

### What's My Purpose?

Why? Why did God create "me"?  
Why? When His being subdues my small mind.  
All His creations - immaculate, but me?  
I am helpless unto Him,  
His power....immovable.  
The answer dawns.....the bell peels.  
I've found my purpose

I'm a subject of His love.  
Liza Swan  
Age 12 years

The second path is "the path of immanence" which is "a creative unfoldment of the divine potential within...." (Heron, 1992, p.201).

#### My Holy Treasure

Nothing withholding my love  
From Him who is utmost perfection  
To Him I trust all earthly values  
The love of this man  
Gifted with the supernatural  
Is my most cherished possession.  
His Holiness and grace

Grow stealthily inside me  
Until I can withhold it no longer  
And it must be  
Carried on the wings of radiance and joy  
Granted to that world  
Of divine creation.

Desley Macaulay  
Age 12 years

#### Loving Union or Ethnic Cleansing at the Close of the 20th Century?

The mystical experience described above by Heron (1992) implies that the authentic human existence "requires that we learn to love, non-judgmentally, non-contractually and non-exclusively...." (Ogilvie, 1993, p.4) however as the 20th century comes to a close, we see the human race at a stage where ethnic groups are deeply divided, and neighbour is alien to neighbour.

These divisions - neighbour against neighbour, race against race, nationality against nationality - are something we have always been prone to, and this year's events raise doubts about whether we are getting any better at bridging these gaps (Auchincloss, 1993, p.26).

It appears that members of the human race have been well and truly educated to be convinced of their "self-identity" as promoted through cultural artefacts. If they do identify with any particular human group, it may well be because they share the same rung of the promotional ladder in a hierarchy, or they perceive each other as sharing the same ethic "cleanness".

In 1963, Glazer warned that the real power in the 20th century did not so much reside in the struggle of workers against repressive, hierarchically minded employers as Marxists argued, as it did in ethnic group against ethnic group. He pointed to the city of New York as an example. "The world's most cosmopolitan city had organized itself into ethnic enclaves and fraternal orders....Thirty years later...(t)ribalism is rampant" (Klein, 1993, p.29). Glazer and Moynihan believe that nothing has really changed: that ideology was never the main social influence.

Klein (1993, p.29) too concludes that "tribal identity (now) neuters meritocracy".

Regardless of whether the cause of human mistreatment is basic hatred of one's neighbour or institutionalized meritocracies "who profess degrees of merit which justify degrees of privilege, which are enjoyed at the expense of the free choice of the relatively underprivileged", there is a common underlying belief. It is the perception of other human beings as separate and alien from one's self. Social initiates are taught this from an early age and learn self-preservation of identity at all costs, even at the cost of torture and murder.

They learn to repudiate as naive any advice that "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" and instead opt to "hunker down where they are, demonizing their neighbours and coveting their turf..." (Klein, 1993, p.29).

The current state of affairs in many parts of the world - the former Yugoslavia, Russia, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, Iraq (Kurdistan), Cambodia, and to a less publicized extent, in Germany, Indonesian Timor, Italy and some large cities in the U.S. - is accurately expressed in the title of Daniel Moynihan's next book. "I'm calling it 'Pandemonium'", he says. "In 'Paradise Lost', Pandemonium was the capital of hell" (Klein, 1993, p.29).

### The Choice

One could be tempted to say that human nature can never change, or one could see this as a desperate point in time when an evolutionary leap is imminent. Despite the current mayhem, we do have a choice as educators and as learners, and Ogilvie's (1993, p.44) comments appear to be apposite:

Which of these two antithetical possibilities we each decide to adopt to guide our personal living, or our racing to our ending, is a matter for free, and hopefully informed, choice.

For those who are dissatisfied with the current stereotype of 'human identity', and who have the courage to disregard the stories of inherent meaninglessness and alienation in the universe, there is another Reality to be rediscovered. Through experiencing it, one develops a new purpose, to learn to live lives committed to unity, to the "christ-role" (Ogilvie, 1993, p.13) wherein each is willing to act as well as s/he can on behalf of the other, as requested by the other (Ogilvie, 1993, p.13).

### Conclusion

While education clearly means the acquisition of formal, culturally acquired knowledge that can be demonstrated and shared in culturally familiar ways with others, it is also simultaneously more than this. It means exploring something beyond words, something that intuitively and experientially you know about yourself and the ground of your being. If one has not felt this second dimension which is inexplicable belief, and so powerful as to claim one's life purpose, one can never have released one's self from the tyranny of cultural consciousness and "soar(ed) in the heavens" (Birch, 1990, p.5).

To make "the final leap to enlightened living, when we will each live the one two-part role of lover-beloved", described by Ogilvie (1993, p.13), and also above by



Heron (1992, p.201), and experienced by young children, we must venture into the spiritual mystery of ourselves. It is then, in the joy of our discovery, that we will say:

To "believe in" is to  
move with the sky.

Steven Marsden  
Age 13 years

### **Bibliography**

- Auchincloss, K. (1993). A fratricidal year. Newsweek. (January 4), pp. 24-28.
- Blakney, R.B. (Ed). (1983). The way of life (Lao Tzu). New York: New American Library.
- Birch, C. (1990). On purpose (A new way of thinking for the new millennium). Kensington: New South Wales University Press.
- Capra, F. (1988). Uncommon wisdom (Conversations with remarkable people). London: Flamingo.
- Heron, J. (1992). Feeling and Personhood (Psychology in another key). London: Sage.
- Harris, M. (1987). Teaching and Religious Imagination (An essay in the theology of teaching). Harper: San Francisco.
- Klein, J. (1993). Entering the capital of hell. Newsweek. (January 4), p.29.
- Krishnamurti, J. (1981). Education and the significance of life. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- McBride, T. (1988). Working with inner opposites towards wholeness. Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. 8, 1, 36-51.
- Ogilvie, D. (1992). The post institutional era. Interlogue. 2, 1, 44-50.
- Ogilvie, D. (1993). The educational battle of the 1990s. International Journal of Lifelong Education. 12, 1, 41-46.
- Ogilvie, D. (1993). Transnational anarchy. Brisbane: Univ. of Queensland.
- Stace, W. (1960). The teachings of the mystics. New York: New American Library.
- Thoreau, H.D. (1908). Walden: or life in the woods. London: N.M. Dent and Sons.
- Wilber, K. (1983). Eye to eye. (The quest for the new paradigm). New York: Anchor.