Education for transformation: meeting students' needs in changing contemporary contexts

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The latter part of the twentieth century saw huge movements of people across many areas of the globe through government-organized migration programs, through extended career pathways, and through the growing numbers of refugees and displaced persons as a result of war, famine, drought and other devastating scenarios. This has led to the rise of societies with multicultural, multi-faith and multi-linguistic features, where once they were mono-cultural and mono-religious and, for the most part, mono-linguistic.

The emergence of these pluralist societies has, in some ways, 'grown' more inclusive and interactive communities with increased tolerance levels. Nonetheless, recent global events in the political, cultural and religious spheres have caused division, discrimination and distrust to surface, thereby unsettling the tenuous mantle of peace and harmony within these communities. This article examines some of these influences on contemporary Australian society and argues that what is needed is education for transformation which reflects a change in consciousness and which is more appropriate to the context of the contemporary world, one that is grounded in the totality of human experience which lies beyond the positivistic, reductionistic, scientific worldview of twentieth-century education.

Keywords: spirituality and education; religious diversity; plurality; Australian society; consciousness; paradigm shift

Introduction

I want to return to the harmony and tolerance of my childhood where I felt included, a valued member of society. I stand before you today as a proud Lebanese Australian but in a very different Australia. (Participant, Shire of Cronulla 2006)

The sentiments contained in the epigraph were expressed by a young Lebanese Australian and were echoed by other young men from his community who took part in a forum organized by the Cronulla Shire in New South Wales about six months after the riots that took place in December 2005. The riots flared up between Lebanese Australian youths and other young 'white' Australian men and were provoked by the ongoing divisiveness and intolerance that had been latent and, sometimes, overt expressions among particular community groups in Australia since 9/11 and the subsequent war against terrorism. While the riots were occurring, many other Australians watched the TV broadcasts with horror and disbelief that this could be happening in their country. Only a few weeks earlier they had watched similar uncontrollable riots happening in France. Such ugliness and violence, stemming as they did from intolerance, and possibly hatred, were difficult realities for most Australians to process, and many were left wondering what was happening to their society; after all, most Australians still perceive themselves to be members of a tolerant society, who value the concept of 'fair go.'

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While this paper will focus largely on this particular aspect of the changing social and political contexts that characterizes Australian society and the implications this has for educational practices and environments, I believe it has relevance for other Western societies that have also witnessed quite significant changes to their composition, ideals, beliefs, and possibly their character, in the past fifty years as the world has become an increasingly smaller place in terms of mobility and accessibility.[1] The factional and regional wars, natural disasters and job prospects which have resulted in large movements of people from one context to another has often led to challenges for both the newcomers and their hosts in terms of adaptation to new cultures, religious beliefs and practices and different political mindsets, to name but a few. These are not specific to Australia but have significance for many other countries which share traits of a Western culture.

This paper, then, aims to

- Examine, with particular reference to Australia, the characteristics of pluralist societies in terms of their ability to create an environment that promotes a sense of self and place for different groups of individuals;
- Explore the possibility of a new and evolving human consciousness that reflects a paradigm shift; and
- Argue that there needs to be a shift from the rational/analytical thinking that provides the framework of current educational programs to one that recognizes the complementary role of imaginative/intuitive thinking which can lead to transformation.

Pluralism and cohesion: the aim of a democratic society

Australia, since white settlement, has been a largely mono-cultural society. While there has been a migration program that stretched back into the previous century, there was a distinct political move to maintain a Eurocentric society, so migration was largely restricted to 'white' people, hence the White Australia policy:

> Australia's approach to immigration from Federation until the latter part of the twentieth century, in effect, excluded non-European immigration. The 'White Australia policy' as it was commonly described, could not, however, withstand the attitudinal changes after World War II, and the growing acknowledgment of Australia's responsibilities as a member of the international community. In 1966 the Liberal-Country Party Government began dismantling the White Australia policy by permitting the immigration of 'distinguished' non-Europeans. (Public Affairs, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2005, Fact Sheet 6)

With the advent of multicultural policies beginning in the early seventies there was recognition that the push for assimilation was, indeed, creating problems for new arrivals, particularly if they were non-English speaking. Accordingly, by 1973 the term 'multiculturalism' had been introduced, and migrant groups were encouraged to form state and national associations to maintain their cultures and promote the survival of their languages and heritages within mainstream institutions.

This move, supported as it was by various government initiatives, resulted in the growth of a vibrant society where newcomers could settle in more easily, as they found links within the broader community to smaller networks composed of people from their own or similar backgrounds. The economic and political situation was generally stable, which meant that the host society had no reason to feel threatened by the newcomers, and, cocooned within this sense of security, many Australians were generally open to the new religions, new cultures and new ideas making their appearances – thereby unconsciously and unintentionally encouraging their absorption into society. Thus, in the relatively affluent times between the seventies and nineties, the changing nature of Australian society was reflected by various elements of many of the different cultures

that had arrived and contributed to social thinking and customs, and, alongside, began a changing consciousness about their identity and relationship to the rest of the world.

It is quite possible that the fairly smooth integration of migrants was due to the fact that Australian society, since the arrival of Europeans, was still a young developing society without the layers of accumulated baggage evident in other countries that are, sometimes, centuries old. Despite this, it is also possible that problems may emerge if a host nation is constantly having to adjust to new arrivals, particularly when the cultural, religious and linguistic features are different; and this has been realized in Australia in the aftermath of 9/11. The subsequent war against terrorism has helped to begin the dismantling of the façade of a buoyant and cohesive society. This has in some part been due to what could be described as somewhat irresponsible media coverage, almost designed to provoke division, but at another level it may be attributed to particular government thinking and policies which have fanned the flames of fear and insecurity and, yes, intolerance and racism.

In the recent past, Australia's relative isolation meant that the impact of disturbances in other parts of the Western world were fairly minor. Today, with Australia's involvement in the war against terrorism, Australians can no longer reside in relative dissociation and view occurrences in the outside world as something distant and therefore, not particularly threatening to their comfort and stability. Instead, they are beginning to experience the effects of global turbulence and divisiveness One outcome is encapsulated in the epigraph at the start of this paper. Second generation young Muslims who grew up in this society in the eighties and nineties and who experienced a secure sense of belonging within the mainstream community, while still being able to enjoy and identify with aspects of their own culture within the wider community, are now finding themselves on the outside as a result of 9/11. This not only creates anxiety and distress but also bewilderment and loss since, in their perceptions, Australia is their home, indeed the only one they have known, where they have grown up and been accepted in the wider community. Suddenly, through no fault or action of their own, other than their religious and/or cultural heritage, they are finding themselves a displaced people. Writing for a Melbourne daily paper, Sushi Das says of the cultural conflicts for young Muslims:

> For some young Muslims, neither their parents' Islamic faith nor Western society provides answers. Lost and confused somewhere in between, their parents lose control of them and they fall into that dark place where they become susceptible to extreme messages, to a simplistic ideology that provides certainty, or to a cause that fills the spiritual void. (Das 2005, 13)

Indeed, Das is referring to an identity crisis and a sense of displacement that afflicts people when they are unable to experience a sense of belonging to or acceptance in their community or country. However, what is of concern is the situation referred to earlier that has now arisen in Australia, where some young people are finding that their accepted and familiar place in society has suddenly developed precarious overtones, that their safe world is being shaken and that their reality has become distorted. Importantly, these young people will have a different mindset from people whose total life experiences have consisted of disadvantage and marginalization. The latter would have a different experience of life and therefore a different voice (Monahan 2004, 252), and their worldview may be laced with a sense of hopelessness since they have always been on the outside. They know no other way to be, and trying to have aspirations or even to find some meaning in their lives may be difficult. Indeed, their behaviour, attitudes and expectations of life will be different from those who once may have known and experienced what it meant to belong and be accepted. The security associated with belonging and being accepted invariably inculcates a sense of self/identity and place and when this is suddenly taken away from an individual, it has a serious detrimental effect on his/her self assurance, self confidence and wellbeing. When this extends to a group of individuals, the resulting sense of displacement can quite possibly generate a kind of 'mob' rage, resentment and hostility, culminating in violence as happened in the Cronulla riots.

It is important to recognize this displacement, and indeed alienation, in relation to young Muslims in many Western societies in the fallout of 9/11. Too often the Western media appears to attribute the problem of terrorists to Islam, without making any distinction between traditional Islam and Islamic practices that have developed in Western countries. The French Islamicist, Olivier Roy (2004), in his book, *Globalised Islam*, argues that the radicalism that has become evident in Islam is the result of the de-territorialization of Islam. He argues that the religious freedom that is experienced in Western democratic societies allows theological debate and various expressions of religiosity. In such cases, particularly when Muslims form a minority group with little cohesion even between themselves, a privatisation of faith occurs which can lead to identification with Western forms of religiosity or with the choice of a new kind of radical violence as embodied by Al- Qaeda (2004, 5).

Speaking of Muslims who have settled in Europe, Roy speaks of the generation gap between first and second generation Muslims who were born and educated in Europe, as not only being different in culture and language, but also in social expectations. He points out that the first generation of Muslims who moved to settle in Europe were basically from the working classes in their country of origin whereas the ones who went to the United States usually came from the educated middle classes, and their income in the States was usually higher than average. Further, he describes the discrepancies between the forms taken by Islam in the West and those in the original culture. He attributes this, partly, to the changing nature of migration where earlier people moved for economic reasons whereas now the ease of mobility has created a new pattern of migration which he describes in terms of globalization. As a rule, these new settlers are a well educated 'floating and mobile' population and they have helped to deterritorialize Muslim communities in the West. Roy argues that deterritorialization has had an impact on the production of Muslim discourse where resettled or uprooted Muslims tend to reassess and consider just what Islam might mean to them and, in response to the beliefs and practices of the non-Muslim societies in which they find themselves, they have re-constructed their Muslim identity. Roy also discusses the impact of the greater freedom of speech that is available to them in their new environments which is something they did not have in their traditional communities where authoritarian regimes and religious establishments strove to deter intellectual dissent. As a result, the new Muslim communities are being formed on a basis that can fit Western culture and legal categories of identity.

It is the impact of this growing divisiveness generated by racial and religious intolerance on both young Western Muslims and their host communities that must be addressed in order to promote the potential of future communities to live cohesively, and where understanding of, listening to and respect for Other is paramount. What is significant here is that in Australia most young Muslims have had different experiences from those of Muslims who have settled in other Western countries as described by Roy. In Australia, as expressed by the young Lebanese Australian and others, they grew up with a sense of self and place in the wider community thus they would not appear to be the deterritorialized people that Roy speaks of. Instead, they are experiencing loss of what they once had which is more likely to generate a sense of injustice with accompanying anger and hostility, rather than hopelessness and/or depression. One outcome could be that these young Muslims may, indeed, seek affiliation with other young Muslims at the global level, thereby becoming part of the deterritorialization movement which could lead to escalating violence and counter-violence in Australia, resulting in a divided community. It is urgent, then, that we attempt to address this problem and offer an education that may promote the capacity in people to change their perspectives and their way of being.

Given the potential seriousness of the situation, it is reassuring to know that there are some signs of hope on the Western horizon, indicated by certain symbols which point to a changing mentality at the grassroots level, where many people are searching for alternative ways to be in

the world. These undercurrents in contemporary society, which reflect this shifting consciousness, will form the basis of the next part of this article.

A paradigm shift and a new evolving consciousness

In the past several years there have been some writings and discussions which propose that perhaps the world is experiencing a paradigm shift. While these proposals have received support they also have their detractors. Nonetheless, what is of interest about the various theories that have been expounded is that most have been generated by an integration of Eastern and Western philosophies. As a result they argue for changes to Western social structures which are based on fragmentation, compartmentalization, consumerism and materialism and a return to a more balanced, holistic way of life with positive relationships between self and everything other than self. For the purposes of this article, I would like to examine just two particular perspectives that have some pertinence here. These relate to Ken Wilber's integral vision and to Willis Harman's (1998) contention that there are signs of an emerging consciousness which is tracing a move away from a positivistic, reductionistic scientific worldview to one that is grounded in the totality of human experience, that is, an integration of an objective and subjective reality.

Wilber's integral vision

Like many, Wilber (1998) attributes the cause for most contemporary societal problems to the separation of science and religion. Science, he argues, is the face of modernity and its purpose is to discover the truth in all aspects of life but it is unable to generate any meaning and value on its own. Conversely, pre-modern religion continues to remains an important dimension in the lives of many precisely because it offers a framework of meaning and value although it cannot provide credible empirical (or scientific) evidence for any of its claims:

> So here is the utterly bizarre structure of today's world: a scientific framework that is global in its reach and omnipresent in its information and communication networks, forms a meaningless skeleton within which hundreds of sub-global, premodern religions create value and meaning for billions; and they each – science and religion each – tend to deny the significance, even reality, to the other. (Wilber 2001, 8)

Wilber's solution is to integrate science and religion because, as, he claims, it was never intended to reach the levels of divisiveness that have been evident through the past century. To achieve this integration, Wilber offers the following argument. He describes four modes of knowing – sensory, mental, archetypal and mystical, and he links them to four aspects of being: body, mind, soul and spirit. In the end, he collapses these four modes of knowing into three which he describes as eye of flesh (empiricism), eye of mind (rationalism) and eye of contemplation (eye of mysticism). Further he contends that these three ways of knowing have a particular language: the eye of flesh is monological ('it' language), the eye of mind is dialogical ('we' language), and the eye of spirit is translogical ('I' language). To sum up, scientific method is empirical and can incorporate the sensory (eye of flesh) and mental (eye of mind) domains. However, it is unable to access the contemplative domain (eye of spirit), which is subjective. Yet it is this domain that provides an integrating factor because it is capable of transcending the first two by providing access to something beyond the physical realm.

Wilber, then, goes further and suggests that the process of integrating religion and science can begin if these three ways of knowing are applied to the 'differentiations' of the value spheres of art, morals and sciences which lies at the heart of the dignity of modernity (1998, 47). What this means is that each of the value spheres of art, morals and science is free to pursue its own truth, without fear of interference or dominance from the other. Certainly, this independence has allowed

each to retain its own integrity and to reach greater heights. As well, they have contributed to various movements that characterize modernity: the beginnings of liberal democracy, the end of slavery, the growth of feminism, and the huge advances in medical science and technology. These are the strengths of modernity. However, as Wilbur acknowledges, it is when the separateness of these areas becomes extreme, and they lose connection with each other, as has happened, dissociation results, with corresponding levels of fragmentation and compartmentalization; hence the problems alluded to earlier.

Accordingly, part of Wilber's strategy is to align the value spheres of art, morals and science with beauty, goodness and truth, respectively. Within each sphere, he identifies its particular language: within the expressive/aesthetic sphere, which is in the subjective domain and is described in the first person, 'I' language; the moral/ethical sphere, which is in the inter-subjective domain incorporating collective interaction and social awareness, social justice, goodness and mutual understanding and is described jointly as the 'we' language; finally, the objective/science sphere, which incorporates Truth which resides in the domain of objective realities and is viewed in empirical and monological ways, from atoms to rocks and ecosystems, and is, therefore, described in the 'it' language (1998, 50). Thus, the 'I,' 'we' and 'it' languages are the meeting point for science and religion where the language of each sphere links to the language of the different ways of knowing.

Drawing the threads of this argument together, an integration of the two becomes the basis of Wilber's integral vision or approach (2001) which is a 'judicial blend of ancient wisdom and modern knowledge' (2001, 34). More importantly, it recognizes a *spectrum of human consciousness* which discloses to each individual, a different type of world (2000, 76). That is, it links the notion of interconnectedness contained in the Wisdom traditions with the notion of differentiation enshrouded in modernity so that each person's perceptions will reveal a different perspective of the same object or situation, depending on their circumstances, background, cultural and religious influences and so on. If, however, there is an exclusive reliance on any one of these modes it will lead to a dominance on one way of knowing based on either empiricism, rationalism or mysticism. Certainly, there is potential for transformative learning to occur if the empirical, rational and contemplative ways of knowing are incorporated into current learning programs which also show the connectedness between the three value spheres of art, morals and science, that is, they provide different perspectives of any given subject, thereby promoting a holistic way of knowing.

Thus, Wilber's model for integrating science and religion suggests a paradigm shift in current thinking, including thinking about learning, since it aims to move beyond the exterior surface of 'it' to the interior dimension of the 'I' and 'we.' In his model, he offers a broad interpretation of empirical evidence to denote experience not only in the sensory and mental domains but also the spiritual. Consequently, he moves from a framework which was dominated by the objective and physical realm to one that recognizes the validity of a subjective and transcendental reality through the eye of spirit or contemplation. In other words, he argues for a shift from the rational/analytical mode of thinking that dictates current educational programs to one that requires a balance between it and imaginative/intuitive thinking.

Willis Harman's global mind change

A similar perspective is offered by Harman (1998) who draws on a range of evidence from literature, history and particular world events to substantiate his assertion that the world is, indeed, experiencing a 'global mind change.' He explores the separation of science and religion in the modern age and argues that every knowledge system reflects and is shaped by the society that constructs it, and it is sustained because it satisfies the tests that are put to it, that is, it is confirmed

by lived human experience in the society of its origin. In other words, Western science is what it is because of the particular nature of the society in which it was developed, and other knowledge systems (for instance, in the East) differ from it because they reflect the characteristics that were valued in the particular societies where they evolved. In noting the implications that arise from this contention, Harman suggests that while the West has assumed a certain confidence and superiority that their scientific view of reality is essentially correct and all other views are wrong, there is a need to consider that other views may perceive reality through different cultural windows which emphasize other aspects of the total human experience. This would make them complementary, rather than wrong. This notion of Harman's is quite significant for a pluralist classroom, since it provides credibility for and authenticates different world views which should affirm students whose cultural and religious beliefs and practices are different from the mainstream culture.

Following this argument, Harman claims that 'every society's knowledge system is parochial – even modern science' and, citing Roger Sperry, he points to the limitations of the modern scientific view in that it does not apply to an important aspect of individual and social life – the area of choosing and implementing fundamental value commitments:

> social values depend … on whether consciousness is believed to be mortal, immortal, reincarnate, or cosmic … localized and brain-bound or essentially universal … Recent conceptual developments in the mind-brain sciences rejecting reductionism and mechanistic determinism on the one side, and dualisms on the other, clear the way for a rational approach to the theory and prescription of values and to the natural fusion of science and religion. (Sperry, cited in Harman 1998, 23)

Thus, Harman concludes, it is the neglect of the subjective realm of experience in Western cultures that has created a certain confusion about values, for it is 'ultimately in this realm of the subjective, the transcendent, and the spiritual that all societies have found the basis for their deepest value-commitments and sense of meaning' (1998, 24).

As well, Harman believes that the answer to contemporary societal problems lies in the stance adopted for the understanding of questions about reality and how things have come to be which has begun to shift from a scientific dominant perspective to one generated by metaphysics; that is, there is a shift of the dominant metaphysic (the positivistic, reductionistic perspective) to one that offers a more holistic perspective. Nonetheless, Harman cautions that this does not necessarily deny the reality of the physical world; rather, it offers a different vantage point from which to view the world so that it appears to point to '*a reality behind the physical world that modern science, in its present form, is in no position to affirm or deny*' (1998, 31). In addition, Harman suggests that a scientific framework that draws on this latter perspective has no conflict with the perennial philosophy which is contained in all religious tradition as discussed by Huxley ([1945] 1985), who suggested that perennial philosophy was

> the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being – the thing is immemorial and universal. (Huxley [1945] 1985, 9).

Accordingly, Huxley described two thought patterns to most religions: the esoteric and the exoteric. The first subscribes to the metaphysic of a divine reality at the core of being; it is the spiritual, almost secretive face of religion and is practised by only a few adherents. The second is the exoteric form which is the pubic form by which the religion is usually identified, that is, through its rituals, practices, architecture and so on. Arguably, it is this form in today's world that tends to exclusivity; it provides a boundary around its followers which promotes a sense of 'us' and 'them.' Thus, the exoteric form has the potential to encourage divisiveness but the essence of esoteric thinking is connectedness.

Returning to Harman, he suggests that this paradigm change can, potentially, bridge the gap that has existed between science and religion over the past couple of centuries and he identifies three characteristics that he believes are evidence of this change:

- Increased emphasis on the interconnectedness of everything, which includes both our inner and outer worlds, for instance, in the various social movements – ecological, feminist, holistic health and the new spirituality.
- A shift in the locus of authority from external to internal, for instance, the growing disenchantment in religious and political spheres of external authorities, which has prompted more reliance on intuition and inner wisdom. He particularly points to the assumption of inner divinity in transpersonal psychology and other forms of new spirituality.
- A shift in the perception of cause from external to internal, for instance, the concept that we create our own reality and that the ultimate cause is to be sought, not in the physical world, but in our minds, or consciousness.

To sum up, both Wilber and Harman point to a distinct shift in the thinking and perspective currently held in the Western world which recognizes that consciousness is the source of all things so that all things are interconnected. Second, they argue that this paradigm shift highlights the corresponding roles of the exterior with the interior in different ways of knowing, that is, the logical and analytical thinking of the conscious mind is complemented by the intuitive and imaginative thinking of the unconscious to provide a more holistic way of knowing. Indeed, Harman goes further and uses a term 'supraconsciousness' to describe a consciousness which generates creativity and imagination, intuitive responses, aesthetic *nous* and spiritual awareness, and which reveals different views of the world to different people.

It is not difficult to identify three of the challenges raised by Harman as comparable to those evident in contemporary pluralist societies, and which were discussed earlier. Certainly, they require some response. One way forward would be to develop educational programs and learning environments that focus not just on the production of knowledge encompassed in a scientific worldview, which is objective but remains on the surface. As well, there needs to be a focus on inner knowledge which generates intuitive wisdom, thereby promoting a holistic worldview that would allow communities to evolve as peaceful, productive and empathetic people.

A possible way forward – the transformation of educational environments and practice

For several years now I have been writing about the need for an education system that recognizes the human person as a rational, emotional spiritual being, one who thinks, feels and intuits. In conjunction with this, I have discussed the complementarity of the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions in learning, which are generated by notions of the rational, emotional and spiritual intelligences, and which could and should lead to depth learning and transformation. I have drawn on various perspectives in literature and research to describe processes in learning which address both the inner and outer life of the student, which involve perceiving, thinking, feeling and intuiting. By encouraging and prompting intuitive responses, learning is enhanced and deepened (see de Souza 2001, 2003, 2004a, b, 2005). In general, this model of learning is conceivably different from most educational programs in Australia and other Western countries, which focus on the attainment of knowledge and skills and, ultimately, on high grades to lead to successful, well-paid jobs.

In contrast, addressing the spiritual dimension of learning is about promoting connectedness within content and between individuals, that is, it seeks to foster positive relationships which should encourage the individual student to feel some empathy with another and to recognize something of the Other within oneself. This is especially important in the current social and political

climate, which reflects certain negative overtones which relate to religious pluralism, separateness and extremism. Certainly, there is some hope for progress to be made with such an approach to education if we are, indeed, experiencing a paradigm shift and a changing consciousness. This change particularly recognizes the role of the imagination and intuition in the learning process that is the different ways of knowing. Certainly, children should be encouraged to access and develop this area of their lives. To do this, we need to explore ways to change various aspects of learning programs and environments of contemporary classrooms so that they promote connect-edness and self knowledge in students through their engagement and interaction with Other.

With the variety of cultural, social and religious backgrounds that may be present in any given classroom, resources and activities, including the arts and the wisdom teachings of different spiritual traditions, may be selected which could provide authentic and valid meeting points; as well, they may prompt a variety of responses from students which could be useful entry points for subsequent activities and discussions to allow students to listen to the stories and experiences of Others. Sometimes these could be completely outside the circle of the students' own experi-ences but, at the same time, may produce some resonances which help them to shape/change their worldview.

As well, universal values of human decency should be modelled at all levels of the school community to inculcate them in students and bridge any differences between them. These values should be made explicit in school documents, in language, in classroom practice, and in relation-ships where overt displays of listening and respect, sensitivity and empathy, care and compassion are evident.

A particular feature that could be derived from Harman's thinking is the need to address the interior world of the student. Strategies that encourage the development of imagination and intuition are one way to begin this process, as well as mentoring and nurturing activities to promote self-knowledge and to allow students to discover their potential. In addition, in the busy-ness of their world, students often lose their awareness of experiences of joy, awe and wonder in their everyday. Strategies that may help them to achieve these things are journal-writing, personal goal-setting, meditation and other contemplative activities.

It is an important factor that engaging with the Other is a path to self-knowledge as one responds to resonances arising from interactions with the Other. Students need to develop skills that allow them to see through the eyes of another and to walk in their shoes, which could be achieved through various forms of play, improvisation and other drama activities, as well as with an effective use of poetry and literature, artworks, film excerpts, and music. Concept maps are also a useful strategy to show the connectedness of different subjects, themes, ideas and places and people. The relationships students develop are an essential element in their spiritual, emotional and, therefore, intellectual well-being; therefore, it is important to develop inclusive communities that are open to dialogue and that welcome and celebrate diversity in a real and meaningful way. If an atmosphere of trust, respect and partnership is built through these various structures within and without school communities, not just in the classroom, students will be more inclined to articulate questions of concern.

Another aspect that could be considered is to create networks between schools and senior-citizen groups to nurture relationships between these two groups within the wider community. In modern societies many children have little experience or exposure to the older members of their families. Contemporary families tend to live quite separate and compartmentalized lives. If children have little experience of the ageing process, how can they develop any empathy with the old and vulnerable in their communities? This is just another perspective to consider.

Many of the activities discussed above may help students to become aware of a transcendent dimension in their everyday, and they should be encouraged to respond to this. These could be moments of revelation, when the core of their being may be stirred by beauty, goodness and truth

and the interconnectedness of everything, so they experience something beyond the physicality of their world, a sense of freedom that allows them to rise above the minutiae of their everyday.

To sum up, while it may be a huge challenge to change traditional systems and structures, the educational approach I am advocating offers some hope for future generations, since it has the potential to shift from the rational/analytical mode of thinking that dictates current educational programs to one that requires a balance between it and imaginative/intuitive thinking. As such, it would be appropriate for societies like Australia, where the issues related to the plurality of religious beliefs are beginning to disturb the tenuous mantle of peace and harmony. An approach such as this would signify an evolving consciousness that nurtures the inner and outer lives of each child, appreciate the plurality of belief and practice that exist within the educational community while recognizing the interconnectedness that links each to the Other, embrace wholeness and connectedness, and ultimately recognize the validity of a subjective and transcendental reality.

Note

1. In this article, I do not attempt to address the complexities associated with Indigenous Australians and their relationship with the rest of Australian society. Indeed, it is unfortunate but true that that there are a significant number of Australians today who have little knowledge of or engagement with Indigenous Australians or their culture, and the influence of Indigenous Australians on social, political and cultural contexts has been seriously restricted. Instead, this article examines the emergence of a migrant society in Australia with largely European and Christian influences and which, more recently, has begun to show the influences of the cultures of new arrivals from non-European countries with multi-religious backgrounds.

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