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Educating for a Conscious Evolution

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A Call for a More Evolved Consciousness

This article is in response to the numerous authors in Volume 2 of *The Journal of Conscious Evolution* addressing the necessity to evolve our consciousness to a more ‘integral, aperspectival’ viewpoint – “one that has clarity of awareness that stands above and yet contains all others” (Combs, p. 11). Ervin Laszlo, in *Planetary Consciousness: Our Next Evolutionary Step*, invites us to create a more equitable and generous world which “call[s] for a different kind of thinking and a different kind of commitment. It is becoming increasingly evident that such thinking and commitment cannot be achieved without the evolution of people’s individual and collective consciousness... we need a more evolved consciousness” (p.2). Copthorne Macdonald writing about *Deep Understanding in an Integral Age* stresses the need for us to become “more holistic knowers” in order “to be able to deal effectively with the major biospheric, social, and economic problems of our day” (p. 4). He points to the development of the intuitive mental domain, i.e. the ability to explore and appreciate one’s own psyche (our inner, subjective lives) - the higher levels of psychological/ spiritual understanding, as a much desired outcome for our education of the 21st century.

Allan Combs, exploring the work of Gebser in *Jean Gebser and the Spirit of Cooperation*, further contributes to the necessity of expanding our consciousness to an ‘integral’ level. Integral consciousness allows for a unique quality of cooperation, “the ability to enter into cooperative exchanges with others while retaining a complete and developed awareness of one's own individuality” ... the individual as well as the

collective goals are acknowledged and honored (p.9). Don Beck focuses on “the search for the paradigm that can best handle the complexity of conditions that confront human life on this planet ... a new paradigm” (p.3), in his writing, *The Search for Cohesion in The Age of Fragmentation: From the New World Order to the Next Global Mesh*. Beck introduces ‘mesh’ as a more finely differentiated metaphor than ‘network’ to capture “a new form of social integration based on the weaving together of the rich textures of human differences and bindings of constant change”...the absorption of “the awesome complexities that now confront global people...” (p. 1).

Evolving an Integral Consciousness

The title of this article, *Educating for a Conscious Evolution*, results from an inquiry into what contributes to the development of an integral consciousness in human beings. What is the quality of education that can effect conscious thought, commitments and actions; intuitive, higher levels of psychological/spiritual understanding; a unique quality of cooperation that allows for both the individual and the collective; and the intelligent knitting together of the rich textures of what it means to be human which can lead one to an integral worldview and holistic knowing? This kind of inquiry took the form of a dissertation research (Adams, 2006), which incorporated a series of interviews with nine graduating seniors, their parents and educators from nine educational programs demonstrating systemic and integral approaches. Their focus was on education as a *systemic*, spanning from pre-school through high school, and *integral* phenomenon, developing and integrating the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual intelligences throughout.

Combs (1996) in his book addressing the evolution of consciousness calls consciousness a subjective ‘presence’ (p. 21). This paper seeks to expand the understanding of ‘presence’ and explore how it might show up in the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual domains. Does consciousness evolve through the body, emotions, spirit and mind, and does it manifest distinctly in each domain? Are our life experiences constructed differently depending on the level of awareness we have in each area? The replies of the research participants to the question, “What supported you in the development and integration of your physical, emotional, mental and spiritual intelligence?” provide many probable answers to these questions. They offer further insights into the possibility of education purposely providing learning experiences that expand our consciousness in each of the intelligence domains. The choices made by the interviewees as major contributors to the development and integration of their intelligences present a clarity of awareness and integral perspective that powerfully responds to what the aforementioned scholars were calling for...”a different kind of thinking and a different kind of commitment” (Laszlo, p.2).

Consciousness in the Physical Domain

Within the *physical* intelligence, the research participants said what made a difference to its development were: 1) the connection of the physical aspects of a person with the physical world and nature; 2) somatic consciousness, being ‘present’ in the body; 3) centeredness; 4) energy; 5) healthy habits/nutrition, and 6) the school, (its philosophical and pedagogical approaches), parents, families, teachers and friends. The fundamental role the *physical* domain plays in our consciousness is clear from these combined comments from the interviewees. These answers indicate a particular quality of

awareness of the body and its interconnectedness with the physical universe, its energetic and grounding attributes, and the way the school and the participants' extended network of support contributed to this 'presence' in their physical self.

Consciousness as awareness, attentiveness, knowledge, understanding and 'presence' reveals itself in the experience of the body's energetic connection with all other energy sources, e.g. other human beings, animals, plants, nature. One's actions and behaviors are consistent with the awareness of the body's physics and its relationship to energy, the body's chemistry in what one ingests, and the body's biology in the acknowledged interrelationship of its internal and external systems.

Consciousness in the *physical* domain is discernible in the relationship a person has with his/her own body. There is a relationship; a depth of knowing, feeling and appreciation; a partnership. There is 'communication' occurring throughout the body; one 'listens' to the body's cues and requirements and respects its messages. Physical awareness is a dynamic, direct and interactive relationship with life - not only a conceptual 'knowing about.'

Consciousness in the Emotional Domain

In the *emotional* domain, interviewees chose: 1) safety, belonging, relationship, love; 2) being known and self expressed; 3) serving; 4) being responsible, 5) mentoring and 6) the school, (its philosophical and pedagogical approaches), teachers, parents, families, and friends, as those experiences that most supported them in expanding their emotional intelligence. The relational role that the *emotional* domain plays in our consciousness is acknowledged in these observations from the research participants. These responses reflect a high degree of awareness of those learning experiences that

solidly root emotional maturity. These kind of experiences provide the ‘sinew’ for the relational connections essential for a ‘different kind of thinking,’ ... ‘an integral worldview,’ ‘holistic knowing,’ ‘complex thinking,’ etc.

Consciousness as awareness, attentiveness, knowledge, understanding and ‘presence’ shows up in the *emotional* domain as deep connection – an individual with him or herself; with his/her family, community, peers, friends, teachers, etc. Being known, loved, listened to, respected, and self expressed, etc. allows a human being to be present and engaged in his/her life. In this environment young people do not withdraw and stop being present to the emergence of their lives. They stay current with their emotional expression, experience their experiences and have little reason to repress or create extensive defense mechanisms. With the addition of being given opportunities to serve, mentor and be responsible inside of a supportive community of teachers, parents, peers and friends, young people are provided with an integral educational environment in which to learn about and practice living more integrated lives.

‘Presence’ in emotional intelligence shows itself in the depth of relationship an individual has with the multitude of feelings and emotions that are constitutive to being human. There is an honoring of the emotional self and an awareness of the authenticity and richness of emotional self expression paired with its responsible articulation. Being emotionally conscious also manifests in the ability to demonstrate plasticity and ‘dance’ with many different kinds of people and anticipate situations and their possible consequences.

Consciousness in the Mental Domain

. When asked what supported them in increasing their *mental* intelligence, interviewees agreed that: 1) the encouragement and ‘space’ to love learning, be curious and follow a passion, 2) have learning be experiential, embodied and relevant to one’s life; 3) be respected and honored as an individual and think and learn for oneself; 4) be given choices, trust and responsibility for learning; 5) know the context in which learning is taking place, and 6) the school, (its philosophical and pedagogical approach), parents, families, teachers and friends, were essential in the growth of their intellect. These answers bring with them an understanding of the indivisibility of quality of consciousness and quality of learning. Students in systemic, integral education programs relate curiosity, passion, love and embodiment of learning, respect, trust, relevancy, context, etc. with the expansion of their consciousness and their quality of learning. This kind of awareness emerges from a freedom of engagement in one’s own growth and development in a natural learning environment.

Consciousness as awareness, attentiveness, knowledge, understanding and ‘presence’ makes itself known in the *mental* domain as a natural expression of being human. When human beings are given the opportunity to discover their own relationship with learning, through their own unique expression, choices, curiosity, passion, experiences, embodiment, etc. their consciousness expands as a result of their ‘presence’ throughout the learning process. Consciousness is seen in mental intelligence as a high level of flexibility and ease of engagement exhibited in the way ideas are interconnected. Awareness expresses itself through contextual thinking; how individuals discriminate, interpret, draw conclusions and communicate; their ability to see larger patterns and grasp the ‘whole’ picture and honor the interconnectedness of all life.

Consciousness in the Spiritual Domain

Interviewees felt that the development of their *spiritual* awareness was enhanced by: 1) being educated in ways that spirituality could show up in their lives, i.e., seeing oneself in relation to a larger world, feeling connected to oneself, others and nature; 2) learning and participating in practices that brought them in touch with themselves, through internal experiences, i.e., meditation, yoga, exercises, self-reflection, journaling, silent time, connection with what they called a 'higher power'; 3) experiencing congruency throughout their life; 4) having conversations about spiritual insights and experiences; 5) understanding and honoring the world's religions and learning the distinction between spirituality and religion, and 6) the school, (its philosophical and pedagogical approach), parents, families, teachers, and friends. Their spiritual intelligence was expanded through specific practices and subtle experiences that brought them 'present' to their place in the interconnectedness existing in life. Their choices accentuate the contextual value of the spiritual intelligence as it has the ability to provide an inclusive 'umbrella' inside of which an aperspectival worldview can be nurtured.

Consciousness as awareness, attentiveness, knowledge, understanding and 'presence' appears in the *spiritual* domain in the quality of meaning, purpose and values an individual creates for her/his life. A spiritual aware person embodies the interconnectedness of all life and sees her or himself in relation to a larger world, connected with themselves, others and nature. There is no confusion between the content and context of beliefs; there is a respect of others and honoring of diverse beliefs. There is an

acknowledgment of the spirit that is present in every human expressing itself as the ‘human spirit;’ that aspect of our selves that gives life to our creative energy.

Educating for a Conscious Evolution

Don Beck’s word ‘mesh,’ used earlier in the context of integration based on the weaving together of the rich textures of human differences, provides a valuable visual as it evokes a picture of a tightly woven fabric. ‘Mesh’ lends itself to reinterpretation to offer another visual. This ‘mesh’ is a tightly woven foundation made of energetic connections from each domain of intelligence; the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Educating for a conscious evolution would provide experiences in each sphere of intelligence that are interwoven from the beginning of life.

Using the responses of the research participants as examples, our education would take place in a community: schools, parents, families, students, teachers and friends committed to supporting one another and providing an integral education. Education would purposely provide learning experiences that expand our consciousness in each of the intelligence domains and weave them together in the process. Each of the comments made by the interviewees represents thousands of learning experiences and each experience expresses itself as an energetic thread that is interwoven with the thousands of energetic threads from experiences in every other area of intelligence. Their ‘woven foundation’ creates a unique kind of consciousness; an integral consciousness.

The six designated categories in each of the domains of intelligence lay an essential foundation and offer values that shape our future - for a “more evolved consciousness,” a shifting “from the ego- and nation-centered dimension to a global and

planet-centered one,” (Laszlo, p.2); “holistic knowing” and engagement with the “higher levels of psychological/ spiritual understanding,” “the exploration of one’s own psyche” and a quality of understanding that is reflected in the quality of our doing (MacDonald, p. 4); the individual as well as the collective goals [being] acknowledged and honored (Combs, p. 9), and a “paradigm that can best handle the complexity of conditions that confront human life on this planet” (Beck, p.3).

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