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Evoking Love in Higher Education: Towards a Sustainable Future

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People say, “All we really need is love.” If there were universal love, all would go well. But we don’t appear to have it. So we have to find a way that works.

— David Bohm, *On Dialogue*

Introduction: Awakening the elephant in the room

I contend that universities have a unique place in our culture, which gives them the opportunity and responsibility to activate and manifest love. I realize that using the “L word” is likely to raise academic eyebrows and, as Jennifer Gidley (2010, p. 353) remarks, “create ontological panic in educrats.” But there is no other way. Love is the elephant in the academic classroom. Love is present in higher education, but it is hidden and repressed. Sometimes it is evident but unacknowledged as love. Making love manifest can transform and unite individuals, organizations and the world.

In this article I attend to just one aspect of university performance and culture, and consider some ways in which those of us who care about renewal in higher education—and nurturing communities of scholars and scholar-practitioners—can make inroads towards change, at least within ourselves and our own circles of influence.

Who else values freedom, the pursuit of truth, social justice and human wellbeing more highly than scholars and scientists? Such values are, or should be, the *raison d’être* of communities of scholars. Constrained within a global economic and financial system

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that places supreme value on short-term private profit, corporations and governments have limited power to address poverty and other global issues, such as climate change. Indeed, nations are so dependent on the survival of their largest corporations, especially banks, that governments will do whatever is necessary, including multi-trillion dollar bailouts, to save the very institutions that got us into the mess in the first place. The danger is that universities are becoming or have become part of what Henry Giroux (2007) calls the “military-industrial-academic complex.” The hope is that universities can play a leadership role in helping the world move in different, more humane and sustainable directions.

It is estimated (as no one really knows) that more than half the world population of nearly seven billion live on less than \$2 per day. Meanwhile, the richest two per cent of the population own over half the world’s wealth. We don’t know the precise numbers, but we do know the gap between rich and poor is widening, not shrinking, and that the natural environment continues to degrade, not restore. Despite all attempts to reverse these trends, income and wealth inequality—along with environmental degradation connected with climate change that feeds into poverty—is worsening. The simple fact is that “without money each daily human need becomes a pain” (Berger, 2007, p. 48). The poor (and many who are not poor or hungry) are vulnerable and fearful, commonly leading lives of quiet desperation, punctuated by heroic stories of love and enlightenment, survival and resistance.

The world is caught between two fanaticisms—the theocratic fanaticism of terror, and the secular fanaticism of war against anyone who stands in the way of profit, irrespective of “collateral damage.” As actor Peter Ustinov said, terror is the war of the poor, and war is the terrorism of the rich. The poet Keats wrote: “Fanatics have their dreams wherewith they weave a paradise for a sect” (cited in Berger, 2007, p. 111). My hope is that those who belong to no sect—including members of university communities—choose to live not in paradise, but in the world, together.

Iconic lives of courage and love are inspirational—individuals who refuse to live what renowned educator Parker Palmer calls a “divided life.” Martin Luther, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, Australia’s Nancy Wake (“The White Mouse”), spring to mind. Such people inspire because of their courage to lead undivided lives—

actions congruent with their deepest values, irrespective of dire personal risk. The world is full of unsung heroes, whose stories of survival and resistance remain untold and who, in John Berger's felicitous phrase, "hold everything dear."

What is love, anyway?

Love, as all but the foolish know, is indefinable. Yet we know love when it is present or when it is absent, because we feel it. Love is beyond words, although the word "love" is much abused. Some people might consider this a good enough reason to keep the word, and whatever it evokes, out of higher education. In our society, love is too readily associated with desire—Eros, romantic love, and sex. But of course the word has much wider and even deeper meanings, including other forms of desire. For example, parent-child love and sibling love, the bonds that are forged between individuals within teams and close-knit groups, the love of God (by whatever name) felt by some religious folk, and the Big Love that some ancient peoples feel towards each other and the divine when they "climb the ropes to God" (Keeney, 2005).

More immediately, love is evident, more or less, in our workplaces. Some people love their work, and enjoy working with others at work. One of the reasons why love is not more manifest in organizations is that love can be a source of pain as well as joy, and many of us have suffered disappointment or even devastation in love. Battered and bruised, we may relish the impersonal, task-oriented culture at work. If we don't express deep feelings or show our vulnerabilities, at least we won't be hurt.

My personal love story

I grew up in a family of healers. My grandparents and parents were chiropractors. They loved their work, and much of their meaning and purpose in life came from the joy of helping others get well. The chiropractic profession was, and still is, battling to establish its credibility as a healing art in a world dominated by allopathic medicine and the pharmaceutical industry, which has hijacked science to its cause. The result has been that homeopathic medicine and other approaches to healing and wellness, including chiropractic, have sought to invoke science to "prove" their credibility and/or to pragmatically point to clinical results ("this works"). This background instilled in me an

appreciation for working from and with love. It also showed me how science, for all the wonderful gifts it has bestowed on humanity, is only one way of knowing, is not value-free, and is often co-opted in the service of power and ideology.

As an undergraduate, I found a love for philosophy and pondering timeless existential questions. As a postgraduate, I harnessed my enchantment with philosophy and political economy in writing a thesis on the so-called value problem. We live in a world where value is equated with price. Most people know this is wrong and inhumane. However, the fiction is maintained and legitimated by economic rationalists, and by a scientific worldview that considers values and ethics to be beyond the scope of science. Perversely, the failures or limitations of science partially account for the popularity of deconstruction and postmodern thinking, the excesses of which are “anything goes” (relativism) or despair (nihilism).

The quality and joy I touched in scholarship was fed by the love of scholars who inspired me. They loved their subjects, they loved teaching and they loved their students. They were nourished by conviction that what they were doing mattered. They also believed and taught that what a student can do or say matters too. I learned to believe in myself, which is a form of self-love, the bedrock upon which loving others and service to others is built.

My earliest work was in the public service. Although love and meaning were manifest in some of my projects and working relationships, for the most part I felt bereft in the bureaucracy. Fear, competition, aggression, control and other divisive behaviours were the norm. Love was there, of course, because it is part of what it means to be human, but it was repressed, unacknowledged and uncultivated. The result, for me, was misery and disconnection. I began to feel that what I was doing didn’t matter, with the result that, spiritually, I was withering on the vine.

Education was my salvation. I spent an exhilarating year studying educational theory and practice, and relating to teachers and fellow students. I founded and developed retail bookstores with a focus on personal and social transformation. For nearly twenty years I sought to access and manifest love in our organization—between employees, with customers, and for the work we were doing. As I wrote at the time: “I loved books. I couldn’t think of selling anything else.” I was also charmed by the cliché:

do what you love and the money will follow. To some extent the money did follow, but not consistently enough. I made many mistakes as a leader and manager. I see now, as I could not then, that some of these mistakes were the result of egoism, ambition and driving for success, which are the antithesis of love.

Accessing the power of love

Not expressing love is endemic in individualist societies, such as ours. It is part of the illusion of autonomy that makes us among the lonelier peoples on the planet. I recall the story of a Papua New Guinean anthropologist who was researching ageing in America. The man was astounded to discover a building in Oakland, California, full of elderly women, mainly widows, living alone in small rooms behind heavily locked doors. These women were frightened and isolated, effectively abandoned by their families and society.

Recently, a woman's remains were discovered in a flat in Sydney. She had been dead for eight years. The woman had family, but they had not been on speaking terms. Government social security payments were still being deposited each fortnight into the woman's bank account until the day her bones were found.

As organization development consultant Roger Harrison contends (2008), when love is repressed in a society's workplaces, we tend to put more of our energy into seeking power and achievement.² Although *power* and *achievement* can and often do contain elements of love, they fall short of what psychologist, David McClelland, called *affiliation* in his well-known model of need and motivation within organizations:

Affiliation can be subtle, and although it can be found in some parts of most organizations it is unlike achievement and power, in that it is unlikely to be the dominant motive openly expressed in most organizations. To the degree that an organization is affiliation-oriented, it will exhibit mutual trust between the

² I am profoundly indebted to and inspired by Roger Harrison (with whom I studied for three months) for his creative ideas and courageous work around accessing love in organizations. In his *Consultant's Journey* (1995), Harrison candidly describes his failures and successes in his "dance of work and spirit" towards wholeness and integration.

individual and the organization. In such an organization people believe that they are valued as human beings, not just as cogs in a machine or contributors to a task. Warmth and even love are common, not just driving enthusiasm or striving for power. People like to come to work in the morning, not only because they like their work, but also because they care for the people they work with. (Harrison, 2008, n.p.)

Who among us has not felt love in our work, in a job well done? It is enjoyable to be productive, to do worthwhile research, to be an excellent teacher or outstanding administrator. There is joy in artistry and creativity, including social creativity, such as the improvisations of a jazz band or a collaborative research project. Beauty on campus, not just in the grounds and buildings, but more so in our faces and in our talk, evokes feelings of love. Walking around my campus, I find it hard to catch the eye of passersby to smile or greet them. Most people seem downcast or encapsulated in their own private world. I rarely see people on campus hug or touch, except very occasionally female friends with each other, or heterosexual couples making out on the lawn.

Expressing our recognition, appreciation and trust to others evokes love and builds bonds between people. The best teaching involves more than subject or discipline expertise, more than lecturing (no matter how engaging and informative), and more than the mastery of techniques, such as eye contact, voice projection, or even Socratic methods. The best teachers are *present* for their students, and they listen and respond from their hearts and heads. As Parker Palmer stresses, we teach who we are. In Emerson's words: "What you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say." Education cannot be delivered, like instruction or pizza. Education requires the freedom to confront questions about meaning and purpose and our common humanity. We avoid these existential questions in the academy by burying ourselves in busy-work, graphically described by Bruce Wilshire as "plucking the hairs of the face of terror without ever looking it in the eye" (Wilshire, 1990, p. 225).

I have come to believe that evoking love in organizations, including universities, is healing, transformative and necessary for a sustainable future. For one thing, the need to express and receive love is fundamental to being human. We are not independent. Of

course, love has its dark or wild side, which makes it scary, hard to control and therefore resisted.

What would happen if we organized our work so that individuals receive as much *intrinsic* satisfaction as possible from their work, rather than working primarily for extrinsic rewards attached to performance, such as money and promotion or, in the case of students, grades? Intrinsic rewards include the sheer pleasure of doing the work well, of “touching quality,” as elite chess player and elite martial artist Josh Waitzkin (2007) says. There is also the authenticity of living according to our highest values, doing work that matters, serving a higher purpose, and so on. By extension, when we see that such intrinsic or psychic satisfactions are important to the organization, our colleagues and our students, we will be more likely to do our best work. Acknowledgment and appreciation of our efforts and work bridges the external-internal divide. Recognition feeds our experience that what we are doing matters. When, for example, a student shows or tells me how much they have enjoyed their learning or unlearning, about insights they’ve had, and so on, I feel that my work has meaning and purpose. Lack of recognition, it is said, makes babies cry and grown men die.

Why is it that after decades of professional development programs for teaching staff, and extraordinary advances in information and communications technologies, we have not produced students who are happier, better informed, and who think and act more critically and wisely? We spend much time on teaching techniques, learning strategies, problem solving, effective communication, and all the rest. What would happen if we forgot about technique and simply focused on being present and listening to our students and colleagues? Is it possible that techniques and methods and subject matter actually keep us from connecting with each other? Management consultant Margaret Wheatley (2008, n.p.) thinks so: “As we learn to be curious and present we are letting go of our fear. As our fear dissipates, we . . . are capable of encountering one another with love. And with love, as we have learned elsewhere, all things are possible.”

Speaking about love in the academy is necessary, but of course not sufficient, to evoke love in our work. We should ask ourselves, “In what ways is this action—in research, teaching, writing or administration—an expression of love?” And, “What are

the barriers that if removed would enable this action to be a more conscious expression of love?”

The extent to which individuals can transgress organizational norms and assumptions varies with the power and perceived importance of the individual to the organization. The initiative of Murdoch University’s new Vice Chancellor, Richard Higgott, to seek and appoint two Deputy Vice Chancellors, one for research and one for education (teaching and learning) may be a potent, if tacit, expression of love. For the latter role, a focus in the position description on nurturing a “progressive teaching and learning strategy,” on “curriculum design and innovation,” and on fostering “an enhanced student experience” could be mere platitudes, or alternatively could be genuine expressions of loving intent. Be that as it may, irrespective of our rank or standing, each of us can touch quality and manifest love in our work within our circle of influence, even if deviance sometimes has to be camouflaged.

Love is blocked by fear, and when we are fearful it is difficult to connect with love. We all have our vulnerabilities. I am fearful when others exercise power and control in ways I experience as personally disempowering. This sometimes happens when I have no say in *what* to teach, and when I have little or no freedom in *how* to teach. Fear is sometimes evoked in me when someone is angry with me. My tendency is either to react or withdraw, neither of which are conducive to love. I also get frightened when I find myself in competition with others and think I am unlikely to win. Or alternatively, that I will win and then have nowhere to hide and will be put to the test. I recently applied for a position in Murdoch’s sustainability school. Both these fears—of failure and of success—were active in me.

Why we do well to evoke love in the academy, and not dilute the power of love by reverting to euphemisms

I considered carefully whether to write about accessing love in academia, because I knew many scholars would frown or perhaps laugh—if not sneer—at the suggestion. What place can love have in institutions committed to science and rationality? Or to financial rather than educational imperatives? Or to perpetuating the economic, political

and gender status quo? Whatever lens one chooses to see higher education through, is not speaking of love in this context at best utopian idealism or at worst nonsense?

I choose to bite the bullet on the big L-word for two reasons. First, although I aspire to recognition and acceptance within some academic circles, I want to do so on my own terms. I want to be true to my self and follow my heart, not merely follow the conventions of the place and day, uncritically. Second, although universities talk about care, empathy, consideration, respect, and other euphemisms for love, I concur with Harrison's view that we cannot fully tap the power and potential of love by avoiding the term "love," scary as it may be. Language has power. As Ursula LeGuin showed in her *A Wizard of Earthsea*, in naming the world we actually create the world. If we are content with euphemisms for love, we may "not be able to evoke either the longings or the resistance that people have for love in organizations or for love in their lives" (Harrison, 1995, p. 163).

For all their outstanding achievements in scholarship, science, teaching and learning, our universities are not serving students and other higher education stakeholders, including society at large, as well as they might. Those of us who work in and around universities are aware of the gap between potential and fulfillment, promise and practice, rhetoric and reality in our beloved institutions. These feelings are so widespread and enduring that we take them for granted and simply set them aside and get on with the ever-growing number of immediate tasks at hand. We are preoccupied with busy-work. We may be philosophical, resigned or despairing, or simply have a gnawing sense of institutional dysfunction. We feel impotent, despite talk of empowerment.

The academy overtly champions critical thinking. Ironically, universities tend to ignore or dismiss contrary views:

Academic culture celebrates "critical thinking," often elevating that capacity to its number-one goal for students. But academic culture is sometimes dominated by orthodoxy as profoundly as any church I know. If a mode of knowing, pedagogy, a life experience, or social perspective is not regarded as kosher in the academy, it too often does not get a fair hearing. (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 23)

Many scholars have critiqued higher education through various lenses—Marxist, feminist, postmodern, humanist, spiritual, ecological, and so on. But of course critique

doesn't necessarily lead to change. In fact, it often serves as a safety valve, which enables change to be resisted.

Harry Lewis, the former dean of Harvard College (one of two schools within Harvard University granting undergraduate degrees), lamented in his book, *Excellence Without a Soul* (2007) that our universities, for all their academic and research brilliance, have lost sight of their core mission, which is to foster human beings in our full humanity. By this he means human beings with passion, compassion and a larger sense of purpose than career and success.

A key reason for academic "blindness" to community and higher purpose is the deep cultural split between knowing and loving:

At bottom, knowing and loving significantly overlap each other: there are passions of the mind that are almost indistinguishable from passions of the heart in the energy they generate. That is why the eleventh-century theologian St. Simeon described the deepest form of human knowing as the result of thinking with "the mind descended into the heart." (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 29)

I contend, as have many others, that unchecked rationality, the worshipping of a scientific (or *scientistic*) worldview that maintains the fiction of value-neutrality and objectivity is a root cause of our dilemmas. As Thomas Moore wrote a century and a half ago: "Logos without Eros becomes sadistic" (cited in de Quincey, 2005, p. 270).

Who of us is not shocked by what some of the most intelligent and highly educated people are doing to other humans, other species and the environment in the name of science, progress and development? Of course, individuals work through institutions, and both the personal and the collective are socially constructed. As universities are a major player in the social construction of humanity, it behooves universities to lead renewal and transformation, to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Unless we soon recognize that truth, meaning and legitimacy are not the sole province of science and rationality, civilization may slip beyond the brink where many thoughtful, caring people believe we now find ourselves. Unless we legitimate and integrate heart and spirit with our rational faculties we may be doomed. As the acclaimed transdisciplinary scholar, Gregory Bateson, said: we need "rigor and imagination, the two

great contraries of mental process, either of which by itself is lethal. Rigor alone is paralytic death, but imagination alone is insanity” (Bateson, 1979, p. 219). Imagination is not the same as love, but it is certainly part of love. In the words of H. L. Mencken, “Love is the triumph of imagination over intelligence.”

Despite our highly educated and rational selves—the so-called “critical Self” that we seek to model for our students and encourage them to develop—we know in our heart of hearts that there is something missing, something unacknowledged. Euripides maintained: “Love is all we have, the only way that each can help the other.” This declaration doesn’t negate reason, philosophy or modern science; it incorporates it.

The poets know the preeminence of love better than scholars and scientists. “Take away love and our earth is a tomb.” (Robert Browning) This could be construed as an insightful comment on climate change and global warming, and any number of other actual or potential ecological and humanitarian concerns or tragedies. Rainer Maria Rilke was unequivocal about the power of love for healing and connection in human affairs. He wrote:

Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings
infinite distances continue, a wonderful living side by side can grow, if they
succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to
see the other whole against the sky.

This is precisely the problem in higher education and beyond. We don’t see, or don’t see clearly enough, “the other whole against the sky.” Instead, all too often we see student numbers and names, a hierarchy of people to be appeased or directed. As scholars or scholars in training, we are tempted to show off and impress. We often do so by means of obscure and pretentious prose, prolific publishing, and what Tannen (2000) calls “agonism”—quarrelsome and sometimes bellicose behaviour (as in the Australian history wars) towards academics holding opposing views.

French philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin prophesied: “Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.” We have certainly gone a long way towards “mastering” the environment, for control and exploitation are central to our politico-economic ethic,

epitomized in United States foreign policy, to which Australian foreign policy obediently adheres. But we may be foolish masters, too devoid of love and foresight to see the ramifications of our shortsighted meddling in complex systems in pursuit of private profit. We need the fire of love for alchemical transformation of the current human condition.

According to the seer Krishnamurti, “The moment you have in your heart this extraordinary thing called love and feel the depth, the delight, the ecstasy of it, you will discover that for you the world is transformed.” Self-transformation is inseparable from social transformation. We cannot hope or expect to transform the other, or the body politic, in our homes, departments, universities or countries, without at the same time transforming ourselves. In short, we must learn to love or love more.

Fear is the opposite of love and a barrier to love. As Margaret Wheatley wrote, three years before 9/11:

. . . the greatest fear I witness is fear of one another—not just fear of certain individuals, but fear of ourselves as a species, fear of life in general. We assume that people are selfish, resistant to change, dependent, deceiving. We fear what people will do to us if we take away the controls and safeguards we've carefully created. We are bombarded with stories of scams, schemes, and betrayals. We read of wars of ethnic cleansing past and all too present. Our fears seem to be well justified, and we wonder if we're taking sufficient precautions in this terrorizing world. (1998, n.p.)

Physicist Arthur Zajonc claims an “epistemology of love” is the true heart of higher education. (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010) He explains that although love seems to have little to do with knowledge and understanding, upon closer inspection it is clear that they are intimately related. According to British educator, Maggie MacLure, universities privilege scientific, quantifiable words, such as objectives, outcomes, standards, testing, metrics, competition, performance and accountability as part of their “evidence-based” agendas and the “audit culture” (as cited in Gidley, 2010, p. 352). In this context, words like love can induce panic or terror. Which is why faculty and students need to take charge, name the elephant in room, and eventually educational bureaucrats will come to the party. Wherever human beings meet and work, love is always present, manifest or

repressed. Not naming love or talking about how to better access its power only exacerbates our disconnection from our work, our selves and each other.

How to evoke love in higher education

Peter Block, a leading organization development consultant, wrote a book with the intriguing title, *The Answer to How is Yes* (2003). Block maintains that organizations often don't act on what matters, because we jump too quickly from "why" to "how" questions, in order to immediately show the impracticality of making proposed changes, which often entail uncomfortable self-confrontation. We are then able to dismiss such ideas as utopian or unrealistic, act on what doesn't matter, or carry on with business as usual. The point is that once we have a powerful "why"—passionately held reasons and feelings (what Wordsworth called the "feeling intellect") for a value or course of action, we are much more likely to look for creative responses to "how" questions and to find a way forward.

So, in this collegial context, we might ask ourselves (and each other, and our students) such questions as: "What do I love about the work I do?"³ My answer would include: I love the sense of satisfaction I get when a student has a breakthrough. This could be a more nuanced understanding of a concept, a deeper appreciation of connections or complexity, or an insight into themselves—such as finding their own voice and realizing that what they have to say and do does matter.

"What do I imagine I and others could do together to make our work something we could love even more?" My response: I can imagine meeting regularly with my teaching and course-designing colleagues, to listen and talk freely with one another in a non-judgmental context about our personal fears, joys, concerns, hopes, aspirations, or anything else that is important to us.

"What do I love or appreciate about the people I work with?" I would say: In the context of my teaching work, I am extremely grateful to one of Murdoch University's unsung heroes Lorraine Marshall for the care she takes in supporting me and other casual

³ I have adopted or adapted several questions in this paper, including this one, from Harrison (2008) and Appreciative Inquiry—a dialogic method I briefly describe in the last section of the paper.

teaching staff to serve (teach) our students. I appreciate the way she distributes notices of job vacancies to her tutors on a regular basis, even though this could mean losing some of her most experienced staff. I see this as an expression of her unselfishness, which is love. Furthermore, I deeply respect Lorraine's commitment to teaching and learning excellence within a university culture that tends to privilege research and publication over pedagogy. Similarly, I admire Lorraine for her long-time championing of interdisciplinarity in an environment where disciplinary approaches to the organization of knowledge and to research and teaching are the norm.

Another question we might ask ourselves is: "What could I and others do to make my relationships with the people I work with deeper, more loving and more generally satisfying?"

The relatively new and trendy transdisciplinary discipline—if that's not a contradiction in terms—Mind, Brain and Education (MBE) science, seeks to interweave the parent disciplines of Educational Psychology, Cognitive Neuroscience and Education. In a milestone book about the implications of MBE for teaching, Tokuhamu-Espinosa (2011, p. 98) notes that learning is closely related to a learner's sense of community and emotional wellbeing:

It was once thought," she writes, "that learning could be separated from how the person feels about others (including the teacher) We now know that learning is always influenced by the social and emotional contexts in which it occurs; the conscientious formation of group activities, for example, has a greater impact than once thought upon the quality of learning.

The word "conscientious" is key. If we wish to develop a sense of community, inclusion and emotional connection between students, why is all or most of our practice and assessment based on *individual* performance? Might it make sense for a significant component of assessment to be group or teamwork-based, just as some commercial organizations reward their people on the basis of team performance and overall organizational results?

Another practice that can help to evoke love in higher education is experiential "service learning." This essentially means getting one's hands "dirty" in the community, in the "real" world wherever needs and opportunities exist. It also means integrating

real-life, embodied experiences and reflection with theoretic understanding gained from critical reading and analysis. Service learning projects can range from spending several weeks living and working in another country, to occasionally serving food to the hungry in a soup kitchen. Such experiences foster empathy in students and teachers that is simply not possible on campus, through books or behind a computer. Most Australian students have little or no experience with the disabled, the elderly, or aborigines. What would it be like for students to spend a day beside someone with a severe disability, or with senior citizens in a nursing home? Or hanging out with indigenous people, or with members of a housing community, sharing meals and conversation?

Contemplative pedagogy or “cognitively oriented spirituality” (Palmer & Zajonc, p. 119) is also a path to activate meaning, purpose and values in higher education. As with service learning, spirituality is conspicuously absent from universities in Australia. Although religion is more or less irrelevant to most Australians, there is a definite interest in spirituality. Innovative courses in the hands of sensitive educators appeal to spiritually hungry students and help to heal the divide between inner and outer. As a student wrote in one such course, *Eros and Insight*, co-taught at Amherst College by physicist Arthur Zajonc and art historian Joel Upton:

. . . life was like being stuck on a never ending merry-go-round with no way to stop it or even slow it down, and certainly no way to get off. . . .

Eros and Insight has awakened me to a new sense of possibilities and self-awareness. . . . I am aware that I am a part of the world, not merely an observer or one mechanically “passing through,” and I know that I must participate in it

So what does all this mean for me? It means that contemplation is the key. If “every object well contemplated creates an organ of perception,”⁴ then I know that I must “create an organ” to understand myself first of all. I must figure out who I am and what I want. . . . In this sense, the very first part of my education will be self-discovery. That is, no more mindless merry-go-round. Instead, I

⁴ The reference is to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “The human beings knows himself only insofar as he knows the world; he perceives the world only in himself, and himself only in the world. Every new object, clearly seen, opens up a new organ of perception in us.”

must face the fact that it is time to grow up and be mindful—deliberate. I tell myself I want to make a difference in the world, but in order to be able to do that I must learn, first about myself, and then about the world. So, “organ formation” about the world is next, and is the path to a contemplative way of knowing/loving. This is the goal, for as Merton concluded, “it is the fullness of love that rejects nothing and no one, is open to ALL in ALL.” (cited in Palmer & Zajonc, pp. 114-15)

“Discrimination is wrong,” “all people, irrespective of race, creed or circumstances are equal,” and other moral principles, don’t lead to change until we empathically connect on a personal level with other human beings. A recent “experiment,” *Go Back to Where You Came From*, shown on SBS television, enabled six ordinary Australians to trace in reverse the journeys that asylum seekers (reduced by politicians and the media to “boat people”) have taken to reach Australia. Deprived of wallets, phones and passports, the Aussies traveled to some of the most dangerous parts of the world with no idea of what was in store for them. They lived with refugees and their families, and formed bonds of friendship. The entire experience was deeply challenging to the participants’ preconceived ideas. Hearts and minds were changed: stereotyping gave way to compassion; simplistic solutions were replaced by a nuanced understanding of the complexity of the issues.

Our universities are structured in a way that leads to a divided life. Deprived of community, experiential learning and contemplation, constrained by the schism between science and religion or spirituality—as in Stephen Jay Gould’s non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA)—students and staff often struggle to find values, meaning and purpose in their work and lives. A more “radical empiricism,” as William James advocated, includes experience of all kinds, not just those things that can be measured and counted. As Einstein famously said: “Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”

As academics, we might ask ourselves, as Palmer & Zajonc (2010) suggest: Have I found the “community of scholars” I thought I was joining when I entered the academy? If I have, is it among members of my discipline or school, or is it with colleagues all over campus?

My impression is that many students and staff feel more or less disconnected from others and from their own original passions. We lead fragmented lives in schools and departments where our academic work is privatized: we do our research and our teaching out of view of colleagues. We're also overloaded, which makes it even harder to get together. Over time, the system that isolates us becomes our choice: "people who live under structural isolation eventually internalize the desire for isolation because of the negative stereotypes and mutual fears that come from not knowing one another" (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 128).

From problems to paradoxes

The old French witticism, "the more things change, the more they remain the same" is a paradox containing more than a grain of truth about change in individuals and organizations. The change paradox of course depends on two different meanings of "change"—one referring to genuine change, the other to the appearance of change or change to that which is inconsequential, such as the proverbial rearranging of the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Paradox is part of the fabric of life. Our challenge is to embrace paradox, not resolve it. There are no solutions or answers to paradoxes. Consider, for example, these two questions, neither of which can be answered in any way that carries coherent social meaning:

- How is it that we can live in mutual care, behave morally, kindly and lovingly towards not just our loved ones, but often towards complete strangers, and at the same time rationally justify and commit atrocious violence?
- If the science of human-induced climate change is unequivocal, and the economic benefits of acting sooner rather than later are clear, why doesn't the world respond appropriately?

Gregory Bateson was the first person to study the effects of paradox in human communication. This led to the "double bind" theory of schizophrenia—as when two contradictory messages are imposed on a person, and the person is forbidden to question

the imposer.⁵ Paradox is embedded in all levels of human affairs and communication. We urge students to think critically and employees to be innovative and creative, but we reward those who are most compliant and predictable. In my own area of teaching, we champion the value of discussion and collaborative learning. But we belie our rhetoric by failing to assess online participation. As a result, in our grade-driven culture, students soon learn what counts and what doesn't: only a handful of students participate regularly and substantively in online conversations.

Looking at large social systems and complex issues, such as climate change, we typically find impasses, escalations and grand programs, such as emissions trading schemes. People have different interests and agendas, which lead to persistent and acrimonious stalemates. Because the different parties—say those who believe human-induced climate change is problematic and those who don't—disagree and see themselves as separate, the process becomes increasingly rancorous and polarised. This applies whether the parties are individuals, political parties, or any other groups.

Another barrier can arise when policies and programs intended to reach some desirable goal don't work out as envisaged and may have unintended adverse consequences. The rioting and loss of life and property that followed from the Australian Government's beleaguered home-insulation scheme is a case in point. Our approach to major social issues—poverty, health care, crime (including terrorism), indigenous living standards, climate change, etc.—is usually to treat them as disparate problems, each requiring its own set of solutions. We then establish large infrastructures, bureaucracies and areas of expertise, which perpetuate and often exacerbate the very situations they ostensibly address. (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974)

Anthropologist Peter Sutton (2010) makes this very point in his radical critique of what he refers to as the failure of the "liberal consensus" in Australia's indigenous public policies. Over and over we see that monolithic agencies and departments are incapable

⁵ For example, a mother telling her child she loves him, but who turns away from the child in disgust. The child doesn't know how to respond to the conflict between the verbal language and the body language, yet depends on the mother for his basic needs. As a child he may be unable to articulate the contradiction and may respond to the quandary or double bind with anxiety, withdrawing emotionally from the relationship, or in other ways.

of understanding or dealing with complex social systems and concerns, in part because they miss the psychic and emotional dimensions:

There is a segregation of the heart, of emotional life, as well as a segregation of powers and bodies in many parts of Australia. The story of high levels of community violence, substance abuse, child abuse and all the rest of it is not at base a medical or legal or political story but one of emotions. It is not different words and grammars that make Aboriginal lives so often untranslatable into the terms of the settler consciousness, and vice versa, but differences between quite opposed ways of responding with the feelings.⁶ (Sutton, 2010, p. 206)

In his provocative book, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*, distinguished climate researcher Mike Hulme argues that we need a new way of thinking and talking about this issue. After thirty years in the climate research trenches, Hulme has come to conceive climate change as a cultural phenomenon, rather than a physical or environmental problem. As such, he maintains that if we are to move beyond polarized and hostile disagreements and towards effective action, we need “a more creative and less pejorative discourse” (Hulme, 2009, p. xxxiv).

Science and economics, the two key perspectives around which the climate change debate has raged, are inadequate. The perspectives of psychology, sociology, politics and international development must also be incorporated. So too, Hulme contends, must epistemology, morality and faith. I agree. I also think that adding or combining disciplines does not overcome fragmented and reductionist knowledge, inherent in disciplinarity. Disciplinary specialization is vital to knowledge generation and pedagogy. However, when disciplinarity is conceived as the *only* valid paradigm, we have a recipe for the “degradation of knowing and learning”:

Disciplinary decadence . . . is the process of critical decay within a field or discipline. In such instances, the proponent ontologizes his or her discipline far beyond its scope. Thus, a decadent scientist criticizes the humanities for not

⁶ For a poignant account of the unbridgeable worldview divide—and consequently unavoidable violent clashes—between Aborigines and early European settlers, see Kate Grenville’s heart-wrenching novel, *The Secret River* (2007).

being scientific; a decadent literary scholar criticizes scientists and social scientists for not being literary or textual; a decadent social scientist sins in two directions—by criticizing the humanities for not being social scientific or social science for not being scientific in accord with, say, physics or biology. . . . Thus, although another discipline or field may offer evidence to the contrary, it could, literally be ignored simply on the basis of not being the point of view of one's discipline or field. (Gordon, 2006, p. 23)

Moreover, multi-disciplinary thinking still carries the implicit assumption that we are focusing on a problem or issue “out there.” Our epistemological assumptions (linear thinking, cause-effect relationships, separation of observer and observed, objectivity, and so on) blind us to complexity, and we don't see the systemic or cybernetic processes that dissolve the separation between our inner and outer worlds. As Hulme (2009) puts it:

Climate change is not simply a “fact” waiting to be discovered, proved or disproved using the tenets and methods of science. Neither is climate change a problem waiting for a solution Not only is climate change altering our physical world, but the idea of climate change is altering our social worlds. . . . Rather than asking “How do we solve climate change?” we need to turn the question around and ask “How does the idea of climate change alter the way we arrive at and achieve our personal aspirations and collective goals? (p. xxviii)

It is the very intractability of climate change, its sociological status as a “wicked”⁷ problem that invites us to question the foundational beliefs upon which our discourse, policy and action is based. The social or cultural aspects of climate change are as important as the scientific, if not more so. Nothing less than fully integral thinking will do. Climate change is construed as an issue or a threat—or as a lie or beef up. It can also be construed as a catalyst and opportunity for us to review our deepest assumptions and perceptions about what it is to be human and our place in the world.

Many scholars and scientists see climate change and other global issues through a wide social and cultural lense. For example, scientist Malcolm Hollick and

⁷ The notion of ‘wickedness’ arises from urban planning. It is a way of describing extremely complex problems, about which people passionately hold contradictory views, thus precluding elegant consensual solutions.

psychotherapist Christine Connelly see the root cause of the human predicament, including human-induced climate change, as trauma. Healing and preventing trauma is the name of the game. Like so many thoughtful and compassionate others, these authors believe

Love is the answer [to trauma]. Love of ourselves. Love of our families. Love of communities. Love of our society. Love of humanity. Love of the Earth and all living beings. Love made manifest in action, caring for each other physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. (Hollick & Connelly, 2011, p. 370)

Psychiatrist and consciousness scholar, Claudio Naranjo, also contends a “pedagogy of love” is required to heal civilization. He writes:

If we take seriously UNESCO’s recommendation of ensuring that people learn to live together (among other things), we need to be aware that [living together] . . . requires the intention to heal our emotional world, which underlies our relationship with others as well as with ourselves. And healing our *emotional* world entails recovering our natural capacity to love—which in turn involves unlearning, or detaching from those destructive attitudinal patterns that we acquired in childhood in reaction to unfortunate circumstances and to the psychological difficulties of family members. (Naranjo, 2010, p. 128)

For Naranjo, the recovery of love is the master key for the transformation of education and the healing of civilization. Just as science and economics are insufficient to face or deal with climate change, so science and rationality or critical thinking are insufficient for quality higher education.

As with climate change, I don’t believe it is helpful to see lack of love in universities as a problem. To do so would likely make the situation worse. As I have indicated, a problem-solving frame can be iatrogenic—lead to policies and actions that cause unwanted and unintended consequences. Of course, genuine problems do exist. These are usually technical matters for which there is a solution. If my car breaks down, the carburetor could be the problem. But in human and social affairs—where there are many complexities and interdependencies, many of which are unknown or unknowable—it is counterproductive to speak of problems, as there are no solutions in practice or in principle. Moreover, there is some truth in the claim that when we adopt a problem

orientation we tend to see more and more things as problematic in our personal and collective lives. When I was last in America, I saw an ad on TV for “anti-happy” pills, designed to bring people down who are (from their partner’s perspective) irritatingly cheerful. Problems invite solutions and create markets. Problems are good for business, good for multiplying areas of expertise, good for bureaucracy. (Watzlawick et. al., 1974)

Despite decades of research in Organizational Behaviour, despite decades of training programs and other organizational interventions, our institutional and social problems remain, like cancer, seemingly incurable. Why is it that so many attempted solutions either seem to have no effect, no lasting effect, or actually exacerbate the problems they were designed to solve? The incidence of mental illness among university students seems to be rising, and many argue that higher educational standards are dropping. How is it that universities seem so unmanageable or problematic when we have learned so much about the art and science of management?

Transformation or renewal in higher education involves the evocation of love, both as a word and a lived experience. In light of the almost self-evident need we have to express love to live a fully human life, the resistance to love in higher education is paradoxical. We have to embrace this paradox. And we would be wise to do so via dialogue and collegial conversation, in the sense I wish to indicate below.

From academic debate to collegial dialogue

If we are to evoke love within universities we need more dialogue and conversation and less debate and discussion. Even lecturing—the traditional method of disseminating knowledge in universities— has its place, of course. But it is one-way “delivery” that is based on a flawed “banking” model of education. A PowerPoint presentation is not, as Stephanie Burns (1999) makes clear, a learning experience. Learning depends on what happens in the minds and hearts of learners, not on what happens in the front of the lecture theatre or tutorial room. Debate and discussion also have limited value. Because the focus is on analysis, unpacking different and often many points of view, and persuasion, debate and discussion typically lead to winners and losers, and seldom to insights and synergy that can flow when two or more minds are working together. As David Bohm (1996, p. 7) notes: “Discussion is almost like a ping-

pong game, where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or get points for yourself.”

Many formal approaches to dialogue have been developed.⁸ Space allows only a cursory look at the use of dialogue in higher education. I believe we could benefit a great deal from David Bohm’s ideas and experience with dialogue. Bohm sees dialogue as a flow of meaning within a group of people, from which new understanding and shared meaning can emerge. This “shared meaning is the ‘glue’ that holds people and societies together” (Bohm, 1996, p. 7), a glue that is sadly lacking in our incoherent postmodern world.

The essence of dialogue for Bohm is (a) listening and (b) suspending one’s assumptions and judgments. Deep listening draws out the other and tends to unite us. Suspending judgments clears the way for new perspectives. If, for example, I think you are an idiot, or that what you are saying is idiotic, it is best for me not to say so, even by innuendo. Equally important, it is best for me not to judge *myself* unfavourably (or favourably) for having such thoughts. Of course, people have different beliefs and opinions, and will therefore disagree. But the point is to question our own opinions, not to defend or proclaim them with a view to convincing others. Defending views with which we identify is in effect defending our selves. Trying to persuade others leads either to fragmentation, driving people apart, or to “group think”—as when tyrants engineer a fear-based and therefore false unity.

Ultimately, as Bohm suggests and seers such as Krishnamurti proclaim, we have to come to terms with the limits and dangers of thought itself. Thought liberates in some contexts, but it also imprisons.⁹ “My own intuition,” writes Claudio Naranjo (2010, p. 178), “is that nothing is so dangerous to us at present as the attachment to the known.”

⁸ See, for example, Isaacs’ *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (1999), which relates to research done through MIT and the Society for Organizational Learning network. *Mapping Dialogue: Essential Tools for Social Change* (Bojer, Roehl, Knuth & Magner, 2008) profiles many methods of dialogue, including Deep Democracy, Open Space Technology, Scenario Planning, World Café, the Israeli-Palestinian School of Peace, and Appreciative Inquiry.

⁹ See, for example, J. Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known* (1969) and David Bohm, *Thought as a System* (1994). Bohm presents Krishnamurti’s at times elusive ideas systematically and clearly.

To evolve, we need to “plunge into unfamiliar waters,” which include evoking love in all that we do.

I would like briefly to consider one dialogic approach with much promise—Appreciative Inquiry (AI).¹⁰ AI is effective because it can engage and inspire even highly diverse and dispersed communities, and because it focuses on organizational strengths rather than weaknesses, common ground rather than differences. The core idea is to find what is good within an organization and build on that. This strategy counteracts the tendency to scapegoat individuals for systemic failures, a practice evident in the way universities see and respond to students with mental health and learning issues. We attend almost exclusively to helping the individual adjust to the organizational culture, and hardly at all to examining more confronting questions of organizational dysfunction or pathology.

AI enables people to speak about and attend to what they love in their work. AI is a process that brings out the best in people by focusing on what works well, rather than on solving problems and on “needs-analysis.” This avoids the trap of demonising individuals or points of view. Equally important, AI avoids the over-wrought counterproductive language of impending doom or imminent peril, which characterizes much higher education critique¹¹, as well as the language of some super-enthusiasts for government action on climate change:

I feel uncomfortable that climate change is widely reported through the language of catastrophe and imminent peril, as ‘the greatest problem facing humanity’, which seeks to trump all others. I believe that such reporting both detracts from what science is good at revealing to us and diminishes the many other ways of thinking, feeling and knowing about climate change which are also essential elements in personal and collective decision making. (Hulme, 2009, p. xxxiii)

¹⁰ For a clear introduction to AI see Cooperrider and Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry* (2005).

¹¹ The titles of recent trenchant critiques of higher education in America illustrate the point: for example, Henry Giroux’s *The University in Chains* (2007); Frank Donoghue’s *The Last Professors* (2008); Derek Bok’s *Universities in the Marketplace* (2003); David Kirp’s *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line* (2003); and Marc Bousquet’s *How the University Works* (2008), which is sub-titled *Higher Education and the Low-wage Nation*.

Formal approaches to change conversations, such as AI, are not always appropriate or necessary. Along with other proponents of transformative, holistic or integral higher education¹², I believe that universities can move in this direction by means of dialogue, or what Parker & Zajonc (2010) call “collegial conversations.” Not only does this non-combative approach benefit the lives of university communities themselves, it could also lead the way for entire societies to become more harmonious and humane. Nothing less is required for a sustainable future for humanity on Spaceship Earth.

Margaret Wheatley, in her recent book *Turning to One Another*, notes the grave social and environmental issues we all face. She asks: “What are we going to do about this? Do we withdraw and hope at least to live a satisfying private life? Or do we turn to one another and do what we can to birth a healthy future?” Universities and other social systems, or complexes of intertwined social systems, *only* change, she says, when a few individuals step forward: “The world doesn’t change from leaders or top-level programs or big ambitious plans. It changes when we, everyday people gathering in small groups, notice what we care about and take those first steps to change the situation.” To do so requires courage, which means “learning how to face our fear so that it stops controlling us. . . . If we don’t learn how to move past our fears, we will not be able to host conversations or become active on behalf of this troubled, still beautiful world” (Wheatley, 2009, p. 5).

Non-judgmental conversations are “gestures of love,” because when we extent to another rather than withdraw into ourselves, we become more fully human:

[C]onversation is the practice of freedom. As we think together, as we question things, we exercise our innate right to be free. [Paolo] Freire said that a genuine act of love always generates “other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love.” So freedom and love are intimately related. (Wheatley, 2009, p. 162)

If we want a more loving, more integrated workplace, where connection is palpable, let’s find people we can talk with about our concerns and our visions. Let’s

¹² An excellent overview of the field can be found in *Integral Education: New Directions for Higher Education* (2010), edited by Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, Jonathon Reams and Olen Gunnlaugson.

explore pedagogies that honour multiple ways of knowing, teaching and learning. Conversations can be between full-time staff, part-time and off-campus teaching staff, students, and alumni. In 1996 Princeton University's alumni gathered around a white paper "Princeton University in the 21st Century: Paths to More Effective Undergraduate Education (A proposal from affectionate alumni and alumnae)." Princeton graduates are proud of their Alma Mater and want to make it even better. This initiative led to the Princeton Public Interest program creating large numbers of service-learning internships and fellowships for Princeton students. (Parker & Zajonc, 2010, p. 130)

Many meetings within the academy are not conversational, in the sense I'm trying to describe. Meetings are often a forum for some people to gain attention and to try to convince others about the rightness or wrongness of a particular view or course of action. We are often more interested in taking a stand and persuasively putting our position than we are in listening. When we do listen, it is more likely to be to find fault and rebut than to find common ground. I'm not suggesting that these patterns are ego-driven. Rather, they are ingrained habits of thinking and discourse that sometimes drive us apart rather than bring us together. Here's a typical conversational structure:

You and I are talking, and you mention a work-related problem . . . or an issue you are wrestling with. I listen until you finish, and then I either tell you what I would do about your problem or . . . tell a parallel story of my own. *Parallel* is exactly the right word for conversation where two people never intersect or illumine or inspire one another but merely run alongside each other for a while until they veer off into isolation again, usually leaving both of them feeling unheard. (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 131)

These authors go on to identify three attitudes that sometime prevent academics who want to see meaningful change from doing anything about it: "I'm a teacher and scholar, not a reformer"; "Even if I wanted to be a reformer, academic staff are powerless to bring about change"; and "No one else on my campus shares my educational values and visions." (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, pp. 131-34)

Academics who see their work as contributing to transformation in some sense, and who feel somewhat like strangers in a strange land in the academy, might rethink their ability to connect with others who also have visions of meaningful change. Power

emerges with focus and action. As Margaret Mead famously remarked: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.” Good scholars understand inquiry as a way of being in the world, and the attitudes and skills—openness, honesty, respect and curiosity—that make for deep inquiry also make for transformative conversation.

We might ask ourselves: If I have dreams for institutional change, what have I done to test my belief that I am alone with my vision and values? I remember feeling like a fish out of water when I once occupied a mid-level management position with a major retailer. I recall the CEO lamenting that most of the firm’s employees left their hearts and souls at home when they came to work. In my need to survive in this dispirited and fearful culture, I sought out and talked with kindred spirits about our mutual concerns and dreams. But my misery was overwhelming and I left the organization after only a few months. My core values were incompatible with the corporate culture. But I did feel comforted and nourished speaking heart-to-heart and authentically with a few empathic colleagues.

The quality of our conversations depends on whom we talk with, where we talk, and how we talk. What we talk about, although clearly important in many conversations, isn’t nearly as important as we think, and isn’t important at all in the purest forms of dialogue. It is disheartening to start a conversation with a small group of people if one or more of them is so negative to the spirit of the conversation that seeds of “insight die before they can germinate” (Parker & Zajonc, 2010, p. 137).

The idea is to create a space that is comfortable (homely) and safe enough for participants to take relational risks. I try to do this in my online learning communities, but with only limited success, perhaps in part due to the disembodied nature of virtual and written communication. There is no face-to-face “glue” to hold the online community together.

I think we want to create spaces where we move beyond blame and justification (students, colleagues, “the powers that be,” etc.) towards responsibility and possibility. Such spaces are inviting and generative. We feel at home and energized. Good teachers create this kind of meaningful, engaging discourse in their classrooms.

In this article I have hinted at the power and value of evoking love in higher education. My intention is to start or continue meaningful conversations among people who want love, emotion, and all aspects of human experience consciously integrated into academic practice. I would also like to see dissenters join these conversations, because disagreement is essential both to scientific discourse and the gentlest forms of dialogue. My only caution is that cynicism and intellectual one-upmanship can thwart these processes. Of course, strong feelings inevitably arise when people feel passionately or feel threatened. Fortunately, if we can find a way through cauldrons of boiling emotion, we will emerge on the other side more united, connected and whole.

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