



Neohumanist Educational Futures Conference

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A. "On Building Neohumanist Futures"

Preamble to the Sixth International Neohumanist Educational Futures Conference 2008 by Dada Shambhushivananda, Kulapati (Chancellor), Ananda Marga Gurukula c/o CNS-Sweden, Ydrefors, 59081 Gullringen, Sweden.

We are living at a very special time in history. On the one hand, we are faced with problems that could cause the death knell of the entire human species; and on the other, we are equipped with the necessary stamina, intellect and awareness that could turn these problems into great opportunities for massive global transformation, and usher in a global golden age. The overarching theme of the conference this summer at International College of Neohumanist Studies in Ydrefors in Småland seems to be inviting us to explore positive visions and actions towards a bright future for all of humanity and other species, and for all the coming generations.

Education can play a constructive role in responding to the challenges posed by the impending collapse of capitalism, apparent clash of cultures, changing planetary environment, unique opportunities created by cyber space, and a growing recognition of global interdependence in myriad areas. In particular, the Neohumanist Education Movement recognizes the importance of "shared visions" and the necessity of working 'cooperatively' towards a shared and cohesive transformation. As our consciousness expands to embrace physical, metaphysical and the transcendental, we are increasingly drawn together by cosmic-hood and by a moral imperative that calls for immediate actions for our collective survival in the midst of a sea of problems.

Here, we may choose to:

- a) Resolve the urgency of building sustainable communities in every nation of the world;
- b) Call for the redirecting of society's resources towards the building of such self-reliant communities;
- d) Explore the application of pedagogies of empowerment to raise levels of awareness for sustainable development; and,
- e) Utilize NHE and related pedagogies to build leadership that would make sane choices and foster the evolution of sustainable futures.

Our neohumanist worldview is steeped in a 'pedagogy of love' where tenderness, trans-disciplinary and transcendental dimensions find their natural nest.

Tenderness - because only affection can overpower the widespread violence of today and transmute the hatred that divides one human heart from another.

Trans-disciplinary - because only a synthetic outlook can replace the outmoded systems based on analytical models that tend to divide the whole reality into separate parts and convert each living being into mechanical robots. Here, logic, emotion and intuition can come together in order to create methodologies and modalities that 'enliven' us rather than 'alienate or burden' us.

Transcendental - because cosmic sentiment alone can draw the power of the unbounded spirit and establish us in the pedagogy of genuine and lasting love.

I also propose that as we deliberate together, we may also want to lay the foundations for a cooperative venture to tap our hidden potentialities for building a sustainable world. One such initiative could be the "Pattern Library" where we can compile all the functional and dysfunctional patterns that foster or inhibit the building of such sustainable futures. This work is akin to the deep work of Tantra - the sa'dhana of reconfiguring our sentiments embedded in patterns. CLA (Causal Layered Analysis) does this too by identifying the stories which generate/confirm/configure our patterns.

Opposing narratives of people sharing the same bio-sphere pose both a challenge and an opportunity. We may conveniently choose to avoid or ignore the underlying core issues; confront or challenge them; compromise grudgingly; surrender to the powerful or to the will of the majority; or choose an enlightened and rational selective combination of these options. Hopefully, we can draw on the wisdom part of our beings to see and foresee the bright side of both the seemingly 'weak' and 'powerful' forces. Indeed, the acid test of success of neohumanism will be how we treat the weakest in society. Our obstacles are internal as well as external. Overcoming them will require an arduous effort to elevate our consciousness, on the one hand, and nurture collective goodwill, on the other.

The curse of neglect is all-pervasive: spanning neglect of the body (inner ecology); neglect of the 'other' especially foes and minorities; neglect of the environment (outer-ecology); neglect of the mind (value-based thinking) and neglect of the spirit (universal welfare).

Some guiding principles that may enable us to approach current situations positively may be:

- a) free the 'present' from old and current myths,
- b) make social life a subset of universal spiritual life,
- c) purify both means and ends,
- d) adopt 'genuine love' as the foundation principle,
- e) look for ways to adopt 'inclusive' as opposed to 'exclusive' approaches. Content, Process & Structure are all important.

Some of these and other solutions are a life-time endeavor and must therefore begin with the young (and teachers) in our schools. A civic spiritual society must provide room for fostering diversities while curbing the prevalent human tendency to widen disparities. Neohumanist Education is one response to the perceived need for evolving an educational system that would create wisdom-based leadership in society. Neohumanism steps out of the traditional paradigm for dealing with civic education - i.e. it is not simply a structural response that involves curriculum, technology and schools. It offers a new deep story and lays bare some of the dysfunctional myths of the present - e.g. God gave us dominion over others; some races or species are destined to suffer more and others will surely attain greatness by divine providence and favor; etc.

Another pertinent question is: Do the ideas of civil society and citizenship relate to city or the nation-state born out of geo-sentiment, socio-sentiment or pseudo-human sentiment; or universal citizenship begotten of neohumanism? History may then need to be constantly re-written in light of neohumanism.

Above all, the wisdom-based leadership of today must balance the centrifugal force clamoring for separateness and individualistic expression with the centripetal force that is passionately longing for greater unity amidst myriad diversities. As Daniel Barenboim said in his Reith lectures some time ago: We indeed need "sensitive talking and painful listening."

B. Abstracts of Articles:

1. Marilyn Mehlmann - The Blind Men and the ESD Elephant
2. Marcus Bussey - Neohumanism and Education for Sustainable Development
3. Dada Veda - Neohumanism, Comparative Economics and Education for a Global Society
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10. Miriam Sannum – Sustainable development as intercultural action – a paradox of unity and uniqueness?

1. "The Blind Men and the ESD Elephant."

Marilyn Mehlmann (contributing editor of The People-Centered Development Forum and general secretary of GAP International).

What is ESD (Education for Sustainable Development)? How is it different from environmental education? It is about trans-disciplinary systems (creating links across borders); it is *for*, not only *about* sustainability, equipping students to act on the knowledge they receive; and it is about the journey of exploration, perhaps even above the predetermined goals.

There are three pillars of SD: ecological, social, and economic. The ecology has an immutable bottom line; society is flexible, but not infinitely so. The economy is the most flexible: we invented it and can re-invent it if it is no longer sustainable.

ESD needs to be about *transcending boundaries*: segmentation of disciplines misses the point. Ultimately, we must educate ourselves to think creatively and freshly about choices, and how sustainable choices can be reflected in complementary economic, social and environmental solutions.

2. Neohumanism and Education for Sustainable Development

Marcus Bussey (Regional Sustainability Research Group, University of the Sunshine Coast)

This paper seeks to explore the points of overlap and potential synergy between ESD and NHE, in reference to Marilyn Mehlmann's paper: *The Blind Men and the ESD Elephant*.

-We live ideas, and these ideas form the bridges between our subjectivities and reality. In an attempt to unpack the "idea" of education, it is necessary to ask: "whose idea of education are we living?" Ideas do things: Education for Sustainable Development requires that we take on new ideas (categories) to deal with the world.

-ESD is a trans-disciplinary approach. Like Neo-humanism, it is about *transcending boundaries*. NHE and ESD share a common goal. However, where ESD is more specifically focused, NHE is more ambitious in proffering a redefinition of humanity and human purpose.

-Redefining economics naturally enters into the picture of sustainable development. Both ESD and NHE have recognized the un-sustainability of current social practices and are seeking creative solutions.

-Neo-humanism acts as a 'utopic': as with ESD, the process is privileged over the goal. It is in the belief in inclusive and participatory action that ESD and NHE stand in deep agreement.

NHE offers a vision and ideational context through which to respond to educational and social processes, and can meet the need identified in Marilyn Mehlmann's paper, of clarifying the scope and direction of sustainable development.

3. Neo Humanism, Comparative Economics and Education for a Global Society

By Ac. Vedaprajinananda Avt.

Humanity is heading towards an era of globalization and global civilization. Education plays a key role in creating a future where we can live together as members of a global village. Education should "foster global thinking", be thought-provoking, and encourage students to think deeply about world conditions, helping people overcome the bondages preventing them from seeing the true nature of society. Within Neo-humanist education, study of comparative economics can aid this process: students should be encouraged to think, discuss, compare and find solutions, keeping in view the common goal of 'one human family.' Widespread introduction of neo-humanistic concepts and practices can provide students with the inspiration and wisdom to build a healthy, stable and prosperous human society.

4. Engineering the Shift in Consciousness

Alberta T. Pedroja, Ph.D. and Arete Brim

A look at systems and models of understanding: 'complex adaptive systems' (in line with the neo-humanist perspective) versus the mechanist approach, which society continues to cling to despite its insufficiency; the 'Black Swan' concept, of highly improbable events that precipitate a shift in consciousness; and the categorization of simple, complicated and complex processes.

Also, discusses how to prepare for the unexpected and develop the characteristics to face and adapt to a new reality. Those characteristics are: resilience; flexibility; mindfulness; vision and discipline; and the ability to learn from experience. Dedication to spiritual practice will help to develop all of these qualities.

The conclusion: ultimately, we will leave the world that is characterized by an unbalanced scientific approach for one possessing expansive thought that will generate solutions to our world crisis.

5. From Multiculturalism to Neohumanism: Pedagogy and Politics in Changing Futures

Sohail Inayatullah

An analysis of multiculturalism, and how it relates to Neohumanism. What does multiculturalism really stand for, and what are its implications? Can multiculturalism transcend its own limitations, becoming multi-civilization and global, climaxing in the life-embracing unity of Neo-humanism?

Neo-humanist pedagogy: is focused on personal, social and spiritual empowerment. It challenges conventional accounts of history, gender, social structure etc, and must not be timid. Multiculturalism and neohumanist pedagogy are a positive step from the wasteland of unculturalism, but not its conclusion. A trans-cultural Neohumanism is the next step.

Beyond shallow liberalism: Pluralism is contextualized by liberalism and remains shallow. Neohumanist cultural education, or *deep multiculturalism*, is about creating structures and processes that allow for the expression of the many civilizations, communities and individuals that we are in the context of a global planetary system. To begin this task, we must first contest the value neutrality of current institutions.

Metaphors of difference: Civilizations use different metaphors to navigate how we see our futures, representing deep structures in terms of how they view self, the other, and nature, and also how they 'language' the world.

Limits of multiculturalism: crucial to an understanding of multiculturalism is that not everything of a culture must be recovered. Cultures are fluid, in process and learning from others. Multiculturalism is useful because it forces us to move outside our own civilizational metaphysics, but it can also be used as a way to freeze culture.

Deconstructing multiculturalism: CLA (Causal Layered Analysis) seeks to unpack and synthetically integrate multiple levels of thinking about the future: the empirical; systemic; worldview; and mythical.

Scenarios of the future: Four scenarios of the future: the Universal Mosaic; the Fortress; “Globalization all the Way”; “The Great Transition”. Where does Neohumanism stand?

Shared basics: There are some basics that must be taught, irrespective of differences. Neohumanism does not create a new compromise between *uni* and *multi*: it creates a new reality. The multiplicities unite in the common neo-humanity that we can be.

6. CLP: Exploring a Neohumanistic Curricula Paradigm

Marcus Bussey (University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia)

A discussion of CLA (Causal Layered Analysis) and CLP (Causal Layered Pedagogy), and their implications in regards to education and curriculum. In a culture addicted to thinking in binaries, CLA acts as a ‘method of the between’: between agency and structure, individual and system, our subjectivities and the objective nature of reality. CLA acts as a tool to reveal the inner processes at work in educational contexts.

CLP, focused on how the unique interacts with the eternal, is reflective of the neohumanistic preoccupation with the subject-object interface. It provides students with the opportunity link their own story to the wider framework of their learning, and seek to find out ‘who they are in context’; its offers a map of knowledge that greatly expands the frontier of the knowable; and creates the possibility within teaching to engage pragmatic processes with an awareness of the eternal. Although the pedagogical potential of CLP is yet to be proved, its promise is manifold.

7. Mapping Neohumanist Futures in Education

Marcus Bussey (University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia)

This article identifies the key features and concerns of Neohumanist Educational Futures. Neohumanist Futures is about understanding that we have a choice about which future we will live, and which we will bequeath to the future generation. Central to this is the awareness of the interconnectivity of existence in and across time and race, and of the desire to liberate ourselves from physical, intellectual and spiritual impediments.

Attention is given to Neohumanist ethics as a basis for futures work in education; the roots of Neohumanism; Neohumanism and critical pedagogy; the relevance of Neohumanism to the emerging global learning environment; the relationship between NHE and Prout; and critical spirituality. Also, considers the position of authority and discipline within different educational systems, and the various streams of thought that converge in the Neohumanist tradition.

8. A New Wave of Consciousness

Dr. Sid Jordan

-This paper asserts that a positive shift in consciousness is the solution to the current world crisis: society must change how it thinks, feels and behaves regarding inner and outer resources. Ours is a crisis not so much of environment, economics, population or politics: in essence it is a crisis of consciousness. Human society must accept its role not just as passive stakeholders but as caretakers of the earth. According to P.R. Sarkar, the inspiration for this consciousness shift lies in the philosophy of Neohumanism.

-To implement this shift, NHE needs to take the inspiration of a special class of artists and teachers. These artists and teachers will connect individuals with a larger sense of community, resulting in compassionate actions on a local and global level.

-Also discussed is the need critical mass of people (tipping point), who will change the psychology of society. Perhaps the required mass of people now exists, but they have no collective identity.

-We require a methodical and rapidly deployable plan for the spread of NHE , and in this way we can move from a 'materialist' modern view to a 'pragmatic universalistic' perspective.

9. ESD and Ukrainian Experience-

For three years we have been working to implement Lessons for Sustainable Development in Ukrainian schools. We believe that some characteristics of ESD are particularly important in the creation of an ESD model for ordinary schools:

* *Squeezing SD into a standard curriculum:* We had to create a special new, integrative and inclusive subject, and implement it within the current model of school education.

* *Finding the 'right' teachers:* The first candidates who present themselves are mostly teachers of biology and geography, with experience of environmental education; but ESD is often understood better by teachers of history, school psychologists, social pedagogues.

* *Educating for action:* ESD should equip our students with all necessary skills to *act* for SD – i.e. help them to develop their skills to relate to themselves and interact with others and with the whole world more harmoniously.

* *Pedagogy.* The course was designed according to the principles for empowering pedagogy developed within the international GAP community.

10. Sustainable development as intercultural action – a paradox of unity and uniqueness?

Miriam Sannum

A reflection on the links between sustainable development, intercultural exchange and science. How and why are they interconnected? Sustainability cannot be generated independently- we have to do it in cooperation, to relearn and recreate in-between existing cultures.

The idea of inter-cultural action is to create something genuinely new together. Out of experiences of existential unity, we can create authentic intercultural actions.

Science is useful in that it furthers our efforts to understand, invent new solutions and ask questions. Alone, however, it cannot create sustainability of intercultural actions.

C. Appendix

11. A Long, Winding (and Rocky) Road to Environmental Education for Development in 2006.

Annette Gough, RMIT University. (Key Words: education for sustainable development; UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.)

Charts the history of environmental education over four decades (1960's- 2006): what has changed and what has held on throughout these decades? Including: the shift of focus from education *about* the environment (environmental education) towards education *for* sustainability; challenges to vagueness in regards to focus and goals, resulting in lack of tangible results; and clarification of educational objectives, including participatory action and skill development alongside awareness and knowledge building. Despite some modifications, is the path being traveled still similar to that embarked upon forty years ago?

12. Embodied Education: Reflections on Sustainable Education

Marcus Bussey, University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, AUSTRALIA

Keywords: Sustainable Education, Neohumanism, Descriptive Inquiry, Futures Thinking

Abstract: This paper explores the thinking that lead to the author's earlier article, written as an entry, for UNESCO's Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS) entitled "Sustainable Education: Imperatives for a Viable Future". The present paper links this thinking to the author's endeavours as a teacher in a wide range of settings: university, secondary, primary and instrumental music. It is an attempt to answer holistic educational philosopher Ron Miller's question: 'How can we teach what we do not live?' (Miller 2000: 53). The paper links the author's own life journey as a teacher of over 20 years to the literature that has informed and shaped his earlier reflections for the UNESCO article. This is in many ways a personal exploration or meditation on what it means to try and teach from a neohumanist paradigm committed to holistic sustainability. This phenomenological positioning follows what Kesson, Traugh and Perez III call 'descriptive inquiry' (2006: 1862). The presentation can be seen as an example of embodied futures thinking that is explored through a narrative presentation drawing on the author's own experience and practice. The environments that shaped this line of thought, while not explicitly present within the body of the paper, include P. R. Sarkar's neohumanist schools, Montessori schools, the Suzuki music studio, John Holt's democratic schools, the current development of an online PROUT College (www.proucollege.org) and finally my experiences teaching undergraduates at university. The central thesis of this paper is that teachers need to embody, albeit imperfectly, the stance they take in the educational arena in their own lives. Thus, in the context of this article, it is argued that there is a direct link between sustainable education and those teaching it, living lives aligned with this pedagogical focus. In

this the author takes to heart the well known phrase from Mahatma Gandhi: Be the change you want to see in the world!

13. Some reflections on Pattern Laboratory from GAP International (Stockholm)

Marilyn Mehlmann, contributing editor of The People-Centered Development Forum and general secretary of GAP International

*The outer boundary of what we currently believe is feasible
is still far short of what we actually must do.*

-- Al Gore, Nobel Acceptance, December 10, 2007

Is the world getting better, or worse? A case can certainly be made for either position. Importantly, at this time, it does seem that the ground-breaking, mind-shifting work of creating a new, sustainable society is slower than the pace at which unsustainable practices are spreading.

Perhaps this can be changed. When we look at projects and programs for sustainable development, almost all seem to begin by re-inventing wheels. The world is full of data bases of 'good' and even 'best' practice, but they have few practical uses. In other words, our projects and programs make very poor use of the experience and resources available to them.

From this observation came the development work from which the concepts of the Pattern Laboratory are emerging. It is an attempt to create a systematic approach to triple-loop learning: not only examining and appraising what we have learnt (double-loop learning) but also describing it in ways that make it accessible to others. It is time to learn not only from our own experience but also from that of others.

"In a constantly changing environment, sustainability is not some ultimate endpoint but ... a continuous process of learning and adaptation. Designing for sustainability not only requires the re-design of our habits, lifestyles and practices, but also, the way we think about design. ... The transition towards sustainability is about co-creating a human civilization that flourishes within the ecological limits of the planetary life support system."

– Daniel Wahl

Co-creation is a whole world away from 'improvements'

The enormous challenge of this work is that we need to find ways to leapfrog. It's not enough to learn to do the same things better – we need to learn in ways that help us leap to new insights, new solutions and new effectiveness. *Every time.* A basic condition is the need to raise our awareness.

'Awareness' can be interpreted at many levels of human being. At every level, it can help us towards sustainable development. In the Pattern Laboratory we turn our attention to a

specific kind of awareness: awareness of our patterns of *behaviour* and in particular our *mental patterns* that dictate our behaviour – in the absence of awareness.

One of the entry points we use is to identify recurring problems. A frequently occurring problem hints at underlying patterns.

For instance, 'We've informed everyone at least five times about the importance of sorting their garbage, but still they don't do it!' This can be related to a generic problem well-known to educators, 'They don't do as I say!' One equally well-known response to this is that in general pupils do what you *do*, not what you say – which indeed is a part of the pattern, though not the whole. This pattern has many facets, and seeing them described in a systematic way can help in finding or generating appropriate solutions.

A Pattern Language

Such systematic descriptions, collected for a given purpose (in our case, sustainable development), are collectively called a Pattern Language. A Pattern Laboratory is used to examine particular experiences from a pattern viewpoint, using existing descriptions as a base and contributing to the further development of the Pattern Language.

A general property ascribed to Pattern Languages is that they enable the generation of an infinite number of solutions to a given question.

A structured process

We are still working on developing the Pattern Laboratory process, by which patterns can be identified and new or improved descriptions created for the Pattern Language.

A general process is

- Identify problems or concerns
- Ask questions leading 'underneath' them, depending on starting point; for instance 'Why is this a problem?', or 'Is this something we recognize from other situations?', or 'Do we find an existing pattern description that seems to match?'
- Formulate 'Advice to myself' for how to avoid or solve the problems
- Add 'Advice to others'
- Review existing pattern descriptions and add or revise

Such a process, for example focused on a project or program, would normally be followed by the production of an evaluation report.

Existing pattern descriptions

Pattern descriptions are currently being collected and uploaded to a web site.