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A Vision of Schools with Spirit

Linda Lantieri

As did many reading these pages, I read Schools with Spirit, the book Linda Lantieri edited in 2001. I did so with great enthusiasm, not only for the articles, but also for the fact that such an important subject was being addressed by someone held with such a high regard in the education community. Linda Lantieri has over thirty years of experience in education as a teacher, administrator, university professor, and an internationally known expert in social and emotional learning and conflict resolution. She serves as the founding director of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) of Educators for Social Responsibility, which supports the program in 400 schools in the United States. She is also the director of the New York satellite office of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), whose central offices are at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Linda is coauthor of Waging Peace in Our Schools (1996) and editor of Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers (2001).

Education should be a source of nurturance for the spirit as well as a means of reaching understanding.

—Linda Darling-Hammond

This essay is dedicated to all children who would benefit from having their inner lives more present in our classrooms, and to the adults who have the courage to help evoke that change. A bold new vision for our schools is needed—one that reclaims them as soulful places of learning where the spiritual dimension is welcomed. My intention here is to explore some of the possibilities and practicalities of creating such a movement and the role you and I can play in it.

I would like to make it clear at the outset that I am not talking about the teaching of religion or religious doctrine, but about ways to attend to what I would call the spiritual life of young people while respecting both the wide range of religious convictions held by many in our diverse and pluralistic society and the more secular worldviews shared by others. The kind of spiritual development I am advocating is not about allowing schools to display the Ten Commandments in their classrooms. I am concerned with fostering and inventing educational approaches that encourage a commitment to those matters of the heart and spirit that are among the positive building blocks of healthy development.

Because this is a complex topic, perhaps the best place to begin is with a bit of personal history.

I've always considered it a great blessing that my occupation and my vocation have coincided—that my professional life has also been my calling. For more than three decades now, I have worked in the field of public education. I have worn many hats: classroom teacher, school administrator, education activist, college faculty member. For the past sixteen years, I've served as the director of one of our country's largest and most successful efforts to teach social and emotional skills in the classroom—the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) of Educators for Social Responsibility. Throughout my career, I have always felt that the education of young people involved not only their intellectual, emotional, and social development but also their spiritual growth. However, the challenge of connecting the inner life of mind and spirit and the outer world of secular education is not an easy one to meet, because, for several reasons, our society seems to have built an almost impenetrable wall between the two.

When I began teaching in a fifth-grade classroom in East Harlem in 1968, I was only twenty years old. I couldn't even vote in the presidential election and yet I was entrusted with nurturing the hearts and minds of thirty-seven children. My training for this task was barely adequate in many ways, but one thing I did know for certain: I was to remember the First Amendment's separation of church and state. I don't recall a time when any education professor or school official actually went over the specifics of what this meant, but it had seemed to me that I was forbidden to discuss with my students those vital questions about life's purpose and meaning that all of us must confront. I had been raised in a faith-based home, and my spiritual experience was and is a central and defining aspect of my life. But this part of me, I concluded, was not welcome in any form in my classroom or my teaching. And so my very rewarding life as a teacher was also a divided one. I realize in hindsight that as long as I was fully present with those thirty-seven children, which happened often, my inner life was being expressed. But it didn't feel that way at the time, and I suspect my experience is not unique.

I was asking myself the most basic of questions: How can I teach my students well? What am I doing here at this school, in this world? I soon noticed that the children at P.S. 171 were often confronting deep questions as well. Depending on how old they were, they were even asking the questions out loud. Among the youngest, what I would call the spiritual dimension was still integrated enough into their

lives that they hadn't yet learned to repress it. During the first week of school, a six-year-old came up to me in the lunchroom, told me his name was Jason, and asked, "Where did my grandmother go when she died?" I remember saying something like, "Maybe you should ask your mother. We can talk about it sometime, but not now." I now regret that I didn't answer, "That's an interesting question, Jason. I also wonder about that. What do *you* think?" (Then, and now, perfectly permissible, by the way, under the Constitution.)¹

As a fifth-grade teacher, though, I didn't often hear this kind of question from my own students. By the time they were nine or ten, it seemed that young people's thoughts about such matters had gone underground. Excluding the promulgation of religion from publicly funded schools, it appeared, had somehow come to mean that nurturing the inner life was not the business of public education. So both children and teachers have had to leave their deeper questions about the mysteries of life at home. I have spent the last several years in the field of public education, struggling with what it would mean to allow those questions back into the classroom—to live, as Parker Palmer puts it in *The Courage to Teach* (1998), "divided no more"² Is it possible for schools to nurture the hearts and spirits of students in ways that do not violate the beliefs of families or the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state that safeguards our religious freedom? Although this is a difficult question to answer, many educators are beginning to acknowledge that teaching the whole child can include welcoming the wisdom of a child's soul into our classrooms. The original intent of the First Amendment was to protect our nation from the establishment of any specific religion or dogma while giving all citizens the right to freely express their own beliefs. Certainly it was never meant to suffocate such an important part of life as our spiritual experience—rather the opposite.

But how this aspect of human existence can be addressed in public schools is still a thorny matter, and I am well aware of how far I am deviating from the status quo in suggesting such a thing. Indeed, numerous well-meaning colleagues have tried to warn me against doing so, and I've thought long and hard about rocking the boat. Luckily, I've had a little practice. In the 1980s and 1990s, we wouldn't have imagined that public schools would embrace the teaching of conflict resolution or emotional intelligence as a normal, natural part of the curriculum, yet I've spent the last decade playing my part in making that happen. So I'm no stranger to mustering up the courage to say and do what I know in my heart will be better for children and teachers.

I take this risk because I strongly feel that the dilemmas of our times are deeply spiritual ones that our children need to be prepared to meet. Most of our young people growing up today, from the poorest to the most affluent, are imprisoned by our obsession as a culture with material things. They get the message early on that to feel good about themselves or to feel the love of their family, they need to own the latest *Star Wars* toy, designer sneakers, or fancy car. We are teaching children, by our example, that we should look to the outside for meaning, not the inside. We are, in Dr. King's words, "judging success by the index of our salaries or the size of our automobiles rather than by the quality of our service and our relationship to humanity" (Children's Defense Fund 2000).

By not welcoming the sacred, by not considering “that which is worthy of respect,” as Palmer puts it, our schools run the risk of raising a whole generation of young people who will be bereft of the wisdom and connectedness they need to live a fully human life.

Having been in the field of violence prevention in schools for so many years, I’m concerned that we don’t make the same mistake twice. Amidst the social crises of the 1980s and 1990s, we waited for young people to really get in trouble, even kill each other, before we responded with programs to create safe schools in our inner cities. More recently, we have seen a number of high-profile killings, including multiple murders linked to suicide by the perpetrators, among young people in the more affluent suburbs. These environments differ, as do the particulars of each individual case of “senseless” violence, but the common threads include fatalism, despair, and a lack of human connectedness. I hope we have learned from that past not to wait for more and more young people to lose their sense of positive meaning and purpose before we invite spirit into education.

Webster’s defines *spirit* as the “animating or vital principle held to give life.” It is the spiritual dimension of our lives that helps us to place our actions in a wider, richer context. I am only one of a number of educators, social scientists, and concerned citizens who are beginning to explore the role of public schools in nurturing a broader, deeper vision that takes us beyond ourselves and gives us and our actions a sense of worth in the context of community.

For me, this vision has deep roots in a very specific experience and history. The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, which I cofounded in 1985, started as a joint initiative of Educators for Social Responsibility/Metropolitan Area and the New York City Board of Education. Today, under the auspices of Educators for Social Responsibility’s national office, I serve as the director of a very successful research-based K–12 curriculum and training program that is now reaching more than 400 schools in eight states, with beginnings in Brazil, England, and Puerto Rico.

From the very start, our aim was to create safe, caring school communities. Over the years, as we worked with teachers, administrators, young people, and parents, I started to notice that sometimes our efforts reached beyond our aim of equipping children and adolescents with practical skills in conflict resolution. The insight and courage that some of our young people exhibited in the most difficult of circumstances seemed to be more than the byproduct of a good prevention program. I began to think about how to intentionally foster the inner strength and resilience that made this possible.

SPIRITUALITY AS BELONGING, CONNECTEDNESS, MEANING, AND PURPOSE

When we open a discussion of nurturing children’s and teachers’ spiritual lives, it’s important to say exactly what we are talking about. Although connected to moral

development and ethical principles, nurturing the spiritual is neither. Morality is about right and wrong, and although certain basic moral principles seem to be universal, their interpretation is often heavily influenced by custom and culture, and may lead to judgmental attitudes and/or separation between people and groups of people with different cultural values. The word “spiritual” often conjures up religious dogma, a set of beliefs and practices one might have, and although religion can indeed be an expression of one’s spiritual nature, it too can be divisive, and many people nurture the spiritual dimension of their lives without adhering to a specific religion.

The definition of *spiritual* that we are exploring here encompasses a realm of human life that is nonjudgmental and integrated. It is about belonging and connectedness, meaning and purpose. Spiritual experience cannot be taught. But it can be uncovered, evoked, found, and recovered.

Humans have the capacity for creativity, for love, for meaning and purpose, for wisdom, beauty, and justice. All these are aspects of our spiritual lives. When they are evoked, the experience is often subjective and intense. Apollo 14 astronaut, Captain Edgar Mitchell, describes it this way:

On February 9, 1971, when I went to the moon, I was as pragmatic a test pilot, engineer, and scientist as any of my colleagues. But when I saw the planet Earth floating in the vastness of space . . . the presence of divinity became almost palpable and I knew that life in the universe was not just an accident based on random processes. It was a knowledge gained through subjective awareness, but it was—and still is—every bit as real as the objective data upon which the navigational program was based. (The Institute of Noetic Sciences 1998, 1)

Spiritual experience can be described as the conscious recognition of a connection that goes beyond our own minds or emotions. It’s the kind of experience that sometimes leaves us without words to describe it.

Most of us have experienced this essence of our human spirit in powerful encounters with nature—from witnessing a glorious sunrise to being captivated by the sound of ocean waves as they meet the shore, from watching ants toil in the dirt to contemplating the moon and the stars. Or we may have been deeply moved by a piece of music, by a painting or a story, or by a certain soul-to-soul flow between ourselves and someone else that lifts us beyond the mundane. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung used the term “synchronicity” to describe meaningful coincidences that are so timely that they seem beyond chance. If we have engaged with intensity in a sport or in physical labor, we may have experienced the “high” of a sensory experience that brings a natural spiritual release. And social issues or work within a community can arouse our passions and connect us to a consciousness that touches what I would call the divine within us.

What would it mean to nurture these experiences in schools in more intentional ways so that our classrooms could be places that facilitate spiritual growth? In the “schools of spirit” that I envision, the following would be true:

- The uniqueness and inherent value of every individual would be honored and education would be seen as a lifelong process;
- Students and teachers alike would be engaged in inquiry, exploring and learning about what has heart and meaning for themselves. Different ways of knowing would be respected—those we could test for and others too subjective to be measured—and we would pay as much attention to whether a student has a sense of his or her purpose in life as we do to his or her SAT scores;
- School leaders would shift from a centralized concept of power to approaches that help individuals and groups to self-organize;
- We would be less concerned with the kind of school spirit that comes from winning a football game and more concerned with the spirit of collaboration and partnership, and with an appreciation of diversity within the school community;
- We would acknowledge our interconnectedness with one another and with all of life, by a commitment to ecological principles, environmental limits, and social responsibility;
- We would enlarge our ability to put to use our gifts of intuition, imagination, and creativity, and we would value personal change as a vehicle for systemic change and social justice; and
- There would be places and time for silence and stillness, to help us face the chaos and complexity of life yet stay in touch with inner truth and the web of interconnectedness.

In short, I believe we need to see schools as active and alive organisms that place a high value on self-knowledge, healthy interpersonal relationships, the building of community, and care for our planet. These goals are not incompatible with the pursuit of academic excellence—indeed, they foster it—and without care, respect, and kindness, what purpose does intellectual competence serve?

Recently, the RCCP released one of the largest scientific evaluations of a school-based social and emotional learning program ever completed. The results supported the conclusion that two years of teaching five thousand young people concrete skills in managing their emotions and resolving conflict actually interrupted developmental pathways that could otherwise lead to violence and aggression. When I had the privilege of being on a panel with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, soon after the presentation of this report at an Appeal for Peace international conference at The Hague, he twinkled when he heard of the study's results. "By the looks of things," he joked, "we could be in deep trouble. Imagine these peace-making skills being incorporated throughout a child's entire education. I'm not sure we would have enough people in the world who would be willing to kill or be killed in wars or who would want a job that has the power to press the button that could cause a nuclear holocaust."³

As we step into the new millennium, we are holding in our individual and collective hands the opportunity to use our civilization's new knowledge and ad-

vances for unbearable evil, devastation, and moral breakdown—or for goodness, transformation, and hope. The choices we make today regarding how we nurture our children’s development will have critical implications for generations to come. Even as we make huge advances in the world of technology and our understanding of the brain, in this country, we are struggling to rescue generations of young people who are growing up without the supports they need to feel valued and to participate in community. Although Yale psychiatrist James Comer tells us: “We are doing the least harm to the most privileged,” according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *Kids Count* report for 1999, 21 percent of American children still live in poverty and “are growing up with a collection of risk factors that are profoundly unsettling.” Many young people today are cut off from an understanding of their lives as having a “higher purpose”—or any purpose at all. Many have trouble even imagining what their future will look like. Psychiatrist James Garbarino, author of *Lost Boys*, calls this terminal thinking, which he warns can undermine young people’s motivation to contribute to their community and invest in their present life circumstances. He also discusses what he calls juvenile vigilantism, speaking of violent boys who have lost confidence in the ability of adults to protect and care for them and so join gangs in order to feel a little safer.

Too many young people experience mental health and adjustment difficulties, and our schools don’t have the resources to provide appropriate help and attention. It is estimated that one out of five nine- to seventeen-year-olds has a diagnosable mental disorder (Shafer et al. 1996, 865–77). The fact is that an increasing number of children are entering schools in crisis—unprepared cognitively and emotionally to learn—while educators confront the challenge of higher public expectations and diminishing internal resources to do their jobs well.

This complex set of social conditions tries the best of us who work in public education. Instead of fostering meaningful discourse, tolerance of divergent thinking, and the opportunity to get to know ourselves and each other, most public schools today look more like what social psychologist Alfie Kohn calls “giant test prep centers.” In most, the deeper questions of life have been put on the back burner. As educators, we are somewhat aware of this void, yet we are not sure what to do about it. Many of us recognize that a one-size-fits-all standardized system of education may have been useful during the industrial age but will not be adequate to prepare our children for living together in the new millennium.

In my work with teachers, principals, and parents, I’ve asked hundreds of groups in the United States and other countries: If you could go to bed tonight and wake up in the morning with the power to ensure that you could teach one thing to all the children of the world, what would it be? The responses are similar no matter where I am or whom I ask: That children feel loved, that they know they have a purpose, that they learn tolerance and compassion, that they have a sense of their interconnectedness with other people and with the natural world. As educators, how can we not consciously and systematically attend to that which we dearly feel matters most?

In a recent survey of 272 “global thinkers” from around the world, five shared values emerged: compassion, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect (Loges and

Kidder 1997). These values seem to be so universal that it appears that they are agreed upon regardless of one's religious or spiritual perspective. And when the American Association of School Administrators asked fifty education leaders a similar question—(What would students need to know and be able to do to thrive during the next century?)—civility and ethical behavior were on the list along with math and science (Uchida et al. 1996, v). So we seem to agree on some of the fundamental tasks of education, and that these tasks extend beyond helping young people stay out of trouble and achieve academic competence. However, we have not yet outlined the steps needed to strengthen these shared values.

When we look carefully at the literature on resilience—those capacities that foster healthy development—we find an attempt to coordinate the social, emotional, moral, physical, and cognitive development of young people. Researchers and practitioners who focus on resiliency go beyond the identification of risk factors such as poverty and social dislocation to the study of how young people's strengths and capabilities can be developed in order to protect them from the potential harm that these circumstances represent. This body of research has direct relevance for our concerns about the nurturing of the inner lives of young people. For example, the Search Institute studied over 100,000 sixth through twelfth-graders in 213 towns and cities throughout the United States in order to identify the "building blocks of healthy development" that assist young people in choosing positive paths, making wise decisions, and growing up to be caring and responsible adults. The Institute's research identified forty positive experiences or qualities, called developmental assets, which have a significant, positive influence on young people's lives (1997, 1–4).

According to the Search Institute, the presence of these assets serves to protect young people from engaging in problem behaviors and harmful and unhealthy choices ranging from alcohol and drug abuse to gang violence and attempted suicide. Several of them pertain to what I would describe as their inner lives:

- *Service to others*—serves in the community one hour or more per week;
- *Religious community*—spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution;
- *Creative activities*—spends three to four hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or the arts;
- *Caring*—places high value on helping others;
- *Integrity*—acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs;
- *Honesty*—tells the truth even when it's not easy;
- *Personal power*—has a sense of control over "things that happen to me;"
- *Sense of purpose*—reports that "my life has a purpose;" and
- *Positive view of personal future*—is optimistic about his or her personal future.

This kind of research points to some of the ways in which our educational institutions can contribute to positive outcomes for youth. The facilitation of these protective factors is important for both adults and young people, and clearly, it involves developing inner strengths that can serve to prevent or repair harm.

Another trend in educational theory that has paved the way for nurturing children's spirits in schools is the social and emotional learning movement. Howard Gardner, with his "multiple intelligences" model, was instrumental in this expansion of our concept of intelligence. The "personal intelligences" Gardner first outlined in the early 1980s included intrapersonal intelligence, which involves knowing and managing one's own feelings, and interpersonal intelligence, which is the ability to understand and get along with others. (He has since considered the addition of three new intelligences to the list. They include a naturalist, a spiritual, and an existential intelligence. While the evidence to support the inclusion of each is varied, Gardner's ideas have a lot to do with the kind of abilities or capacities that schools with spirit would promote) (1999).

Social psychologist Daniel Goleman, author of the best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), has contributed much to our thinking about the need to nurture the social and emotional lives of children. He summarizes research from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology that identifies emotional intelligence (EQ) as being as important as IQ in terms of children's healthy development and future life success. He writes:

One of psychology's open secrets is the relative inability of grades, IQ, or SAT scores, despite their popular mystiques, to predict unerringly who will succeed in life. . . . There are widespread exceptions to the rule that IQ predicts success—many (or more) exceptions than cases that fit the rule. At best, IQ contributes about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 percent to other forces. (1995, 34)

Goleman's work helped educators understand the importance of emotional intelligence as a basic requirement for the effective use of one's IQ—that is, one's cognitive skills and knowledge. He made the connection between our feelings and our thinking more explicit by pointing out how the brain's emotional and executive areas are interconnected physiologically, especially as these areas relate to teaching and learning. The prefrontal lobes of the brain, which control emotional impulses, are also where working memory resides and all learning takes place. Goleman's summary of recent neuroscientific research has made us aware that when chronic anxiety, anger, or upset feelings are intruding on children's thoughts, less capacity is available in working memory to process what they are trying to learn. This implies that, at least in part, academic success depends on a student's ability to maintain positive social interactions. As a result of Goleman's work, schools across the country have begun helping children strengthen their EQs by equipping them with concrete skills for identifying and managing their emotions, communicating effectively, and resolving conflicts nonviolently. These skills help children to make good decisions, to be more empathetic, and to be optimistic in the face of setbacks.

Many school systems across the country have used the frameworks developed by social scientists to bring together under one umbrella various different efforts for preventing "risky" and/or antisocial behavior among young people. This approach

acknowledges that the development of social and emotional skills is a critical factor in school-based prevention efforts, and it calls for an integration of the cognitive and affective domains for all students as a means of enhancing their chances for academic and personal success.

In the late 1990s, Danah Zohar, a visiting fellow at Oxford University, and Ian Marshall, a practicing psychiatrist, did for spiritual intelligence what Daniel Goleman did for emotional intelligence. Zohar and Marshall brought together an array of recent research that showed evidence that there is an “ultimate intelligence based on a third neural system in the brain”—a spiritual intelligence (2000).

Spiritual intelligence, or SQ, as Zohar and Marshall call it, is “the intelligence with which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider . . . context.” They point out that neither IQ or EQ can fully explain the complexity of human intelligence or richness of the human soul. Computers have high IQs; animals can be highly sensitive to their owner’s moods. The “why” questions—asking how things could be better or different—and the ability to envision unrealized possibilities or to wrestle with questions of good and evil are all in the realm of SQ. Zohar and Marshall call spiritual intelligence the ultimate intelligence because it is the necessary foundation for the effective functioning of the other intelligences and because it has a transformative power:

My emotional intelligence allows me to judge what situation I am in and then behave appropriately within it. This is working within the boundaries of the situation, allowing the situation to guide me. But my spiritual intelligence allows me to ask if I want to be in this particular situation in the first place. Would I rather change the situation, creating a better one? This is working with the boundaries of the situation, allowing me to guide the situation. (2000)

Zohar and Marshall’s work attempts to distill what scientific evidence we do have concerning this realm of experience, even though they are the first to admit that existing science is not well-equipped to study something like meaning and its role in our lives. They also outline some of the competencies, skills, or qualities of a “spiritually intelligent” person:

- *A high degree of self-awareness*—knowing who we are, what our strengths and limits are, what we live for;
- *The capacity to be inspired by vision and values*—a caring that transcends self-interest, a sense of service;
- *The ability to face and use suffering and transcend pain*—learning from mistakes, our own and those of others; acknowledging our weaknesses and cultivating our strengths;
- *A holistic worldview*—an ability to see connections between diverse things and take “the bigger picture” into account;

- *An appreciation of diversity*—being grateful for differences that challenge our assumptions and values and help us grow;
- *Being “field independent”*—possessing the capacity to stand against the crowd or work against convention;
- *Spontaneity*—the ability to be flexible and actively adaptive;
- *A marked tendency to ask “why” or “what” questions and seek “fundamental” answers*; and
- *Compassion*—a reluctance to cause unnecessary harm.

British researchers David Hay and Rebecca Nye, coauthors of the book *The Spirit of the Child*, have done research on the lives of young children that suggests that spiritual awareness and expression may be a natural predisposition, a biological reality that is a given of the human condition and a byproduct of evolution. Among the areas of childhood experience they link to the spiritual dimension are an intense awareness of being “here and now” as opposed to living in the past or the future, an awareness of the mystery of life, and an intensity of feeling about what we most value.

To investigate such elusive concepts, Hay and Nye asked children to respond to a series of photographs depicting subjects such as a girl gazing into a fire, a boy looking out at the stars, a girl mourning the death of a pet. Their first and most important finding was that, although they scrupulously avoided prompting for religious concepts, they did not come across a single child without a sense of spirituality. Indeed, the majority of the children in their sample did not come from faith-based homes and had very limited religious vocabularies but used the language of fairy tales or science fiction to express what Hay and Nye call “relational consciousness,” that is, an intense awareness of relatedness—to god, to nature, to other people, or to self.

Clearly, such a predisposition connects closely to ethical and moral behavior. It helps us begin to make the link between damage to oneself and damage to others, care for oneself and care for others. Acknowledging these connections between social and moral development and the implications of research on spiritual awareness in young children can help us begin the dialogue about what the content of a spiritual curriculum might include.

How successful will we be in welcoming spirit into our secular schools? It will depend on how honestly those of us who are struggling to live an integrated life are willing to talk about and share our struggle with our more skeptical colleagues. And we’ve got a few challenges ahead of us in terms of giving this movement some momentum.

First, we have to continue to redefine what it means to be an educated person. This is a worldwide challenge to widen the vision of education beyond mastering a body of knowledge as measured on standardized tests. Even teachers who use our well-established RCCP are telling us that they are hanging on by a thread to make room for teaching our curriculum.

It will help to meet the educational field where it is by acknowledging that academics are, and always will be, central. The new vision of “soulful” education that

I am writing about has the potential of producing students who not only have direction and purpose in life but are also emotionally and socially skillful, *and* more academically competent as well. It is not an either/or situation and we have to communicate that.

The second challenge is for adults to let young people show us how we can help them cultivate their inner lives, including openness and creativity. J. Robert Oppenheimer, one of the pioneers of nuclear energy, once said, "There are children playing in the streets who could solve some of the top problems in physics because they have modes of sensory perception that I lost long ago." Exploration, innovation, and creativity often come more easily to children and young people, and children are interested in life's most basic questions. Our task is to remember how integrated young children's spirituality is and to find ways to protect it from being trampled. This is part of what Nancy Carlsson-Paige of Lesley University calls teaching the whole child.⁴

Sadly, as children move through our schools, they often receive spoken and unspoken messages that extraordinary experiences related to their inner lives are not honored as part of their reality. The older they become, the more repressed, forgotten, and locked within themselves this awareness and these experiences become. Adolescence offers an opportunity to reopen this line of inquiry, yet young people at this stage are usually met with the adult tendency to ignore or trivialize transcendental experiences. What complicates matters is that few of us have experienced as learners the kind of holistic education we want to put into practice as teachers. If we hope to be a part of bringing this work into schools, we will each need to find positive models and experiences that can show us how to live and teach in a more integrated way. In my own case, as a senior scholar at the Fetzer Institute (a foundation that investigates the implications of mind-body-spirit unity), being a part of this community over a three-year period was one such experience.

The third challenge we face in welcoming children's inner lives into our public schools is developing a common vocabulary for how we talk about these things. How can we create a common ground for discussing the ultimate questions of meaning and purpose? For some of us, various words that I've used in this essay may have been an obstacle. Perceptions of terms like *sacred*, *inner life*, and *spiritual* are different for different people. We haven't yet developed an inclusive way to describe this realm of experience. We also need to find practices and approaches in the classroom that celebrate and respect the diversity of our individual religious and spiritual beliefs. We need to find ways to talk about these concerns that are as palatable to an evangelical Christian as to someone whose inner life is not defined by a specific religion. It will be important for schools and districts to reach a consensus through a democratic process in which decision making includes all of those affected. It is only through building trust and truly listening to one another that fair guidelines can be developed for discussing matters of belief and values.

The fourth challenge is to root this work in scientific research, as well as in sound pedagogy and child development theory. Most child development theory has focused on personality development and on the emotional and intellectual realms;

only rarely does it consider the spiritual or intuitive dimensions of experience. However, recently we are seeing more and more studies that point to the benefits of nurturing children's spiritual development. Current research in social/emotional learning and positive youth development has already begun to make this connection; it is important that we encourage further work in this direction.

The fifth challenge is how to go about integrating the inner lives of students into the curriculum of a school district. I believe that this calls for a process very different from what we see happening in the prevention field or in the field of social and emotional learning, in which we institutionalize innovation by standardizing promising practices. To nurture children's spiritual development, I don't think we will need to implement programs or create teachers' guides with prescriptive directions. Instead, this movement will rely on people—teachers, parents, principals—who are committed to the idea of reaching the whole child and to sustainable systemic change that will make that possible. I hope we won't write scripts that tell us the right things to say; we will have to improvise and evaluate our effectiveness by means other than test scores. Practitioners will have to be the “change masters” Angeles Arrien talks about—designing, developing, and sharing flexible approaches to this domain.⁵

Finally, we can't think about doing this work in classrooms without supporting teachers in the nurturing of their own inner lives. Many of us want to help young people find deeper purpose and meaning, but we can't give what we don't have. In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes, “We teach who we are.”

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness. . . . As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. . . . Knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. . . . When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels of embodied personal meaning. (1998, 2)

Soul work isn't about giving our students a road map. This teaching must flow from the quality of each teacher's own inner life.

Box 18.1 is a self-assessment tool for organizing our thoughts about how we might begin to welcome what I have called the spiritual domain into our classrooms—how we can more intentionally create a larger space in our schools for children's inner lives.

Nel Noddings, educator and author of *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, beautifully sums up the kind of education we are advocating:

I have argued that education should be organized around themes of care rather than traditional disciplines. All students should emerge in a general education that guides them in caring for self, intimate others, global others, plants, animals, and the environment, the human-made world and ideas. Such an aim doesn't work against intellectual development or academic achievement. On the contrary, it supplies a firm foundation for both. (1995, 679)

Box 18.1 A Self-Assessment Quiz

1. Is there a sense of community in your classroom?
2. Do both you and your students feel comfortable sharing thoughts and questions about values, meaning, and purpose?
3. Do you encourage respect for diversity of opinions, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds among your students?
4. Are there opportunities in the school day or week to appreciate the beauty of a work of art or to allow students to make art—poems, pictures, sculptures, music, drama—themselves?
5. Do you provide regular activities to explore and spend time in nature? Are elements from nature present in the classroom?
6. Do you and your students have ample opportunity through studying history or through storytelling to honor the power of ancestors and the past?
7. Is there some free time in the school day, including time for silence and reflection?
8. Do you have the flexibility to allow for moments of spontaneity in which intuition redirects a discussion or an activity?
9. Are there opportunities for students to become involved in volunteering, or to participate in community or social action projects?
10. Do you and your students feel that most of what is being taught and learned is authentic, meaningful, and useful?

And Daniel Goleman writes:

This new focus moves some of the key elements of emotional intelligence into a deeper dimension. Self-awareness takes on a new depth of inner exploration; managing emotions becomes self-discipline; empathy becomes a basis for altruism, caring, and compassion. And all of these basic skills for life can now be seen as building blocks of character. (2001, ix)

A window of opportunity exists right now in the field of education for soul to enter. The advocates of character education have provided a framework that respects the vital constitutional principle of the separation of church and state. We must use this opening to broaden our work even further, and we need to support one another and engage people of all persuasions in this unfolding process.

Our mission is to insist that we develop policies and approaches that enable all of our children to have their human spirits uplifted and their inner lives nourished as a normal, natural part of their schooling. It will take enormous courage and energy to work across the existing boundaries. Far from being marginal or irrelevant, attention to our inner life of mind and spirit will help us achieve the equilibrium we need in this chaotic world; we must foster the compassion, insight, and commitment to community that will be necessary to tackle the deep emotional, social, political, and spiritual dilemmas of our time.

As I look at the huge problems our young people will inherit—racism, poverty, violence, the degradation of nature—I can't imagine how we will make it if we neglect soul. My hope is that each of us finds a way to act to make sure that no child is left behind and that every aspect of the human spirit is welcomed in our homes, communities, and especially our schools.

NOTES

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1. The clause of the First Amendment regarding religion reads, in its entirety, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." At the very least, this means the U.S. Constitution recognizes religious faith as a fundamental right of the individual, superseding government intervention. In interpreting this amendment with reference to public education, the U.S. Supreme Court has clearly supported the study of religion, as well as the inclusion of religion in the curriculum in historical and cultural contexts. Public school teachers are not to advocate a particular point of view, but they may accept the expression of young people's religious views as germane to an open discussion, a homework assignment, or any other academic project. Freedom of religious expression in schools does not include the right to force a "captive audience [to] listen or to compel other students to participate" in religious activities or discussions, but it does allow individual students to pray, read scripture, discuss their faith, and even to invite others to join their own particular religious groups, as long as this is not coercive or disruptive to others.

Although school officials may not organize religious activities, including prayer, they may lead a group in a moment of silence. The use of music, art, drama, and literature with religious themes is also permissible if it serves an educational curriculum goal, as long as this does not become a vehicle to promote a particular religious belief. See U.S. Department of Education, "Religious Expression in Public Schools: A Statement of Principles," June 1998.

2. Parker J. Palmer writes and teaches on issues of education, community, spirituality, and social change. *The Leadership Project* has named him as one of the thirty "most influential senior leaders" in the field of higher education today.

3. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, remarks during the Appeal for Peace International Conference, The Hague, Netherlands, May 12, 1999.

4. Nancy Carlsson-Paige teaches social development and early childhood education, and is co-founder, with Linda Lantieri, of the masters degree program in Conflict Resolution and Peaceable Schools at Lesley University.

5. Angeles Arrien is an anthropologist, educator, and author who is also president of the Foundation for Cross-Cultural Education and Research.

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