

**MILO4400**

**Symposium: With and against critical pedagogy: knowledge, power and the  
'Buddhist imaginary'  
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**Paper: Critical spirituality as a resource for fostering critical pedagogy**

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**Introduction**

Two central assertions are made in this seminar. The first is that our present historical moment is marked by the ever-increasing cultural, social, demographic and epistemic complexity. The second is that even though a number of pedagogies have been developed in response to this complexity most fall short in terms of the practical implementation of their own theoretical and ethical principles.

As these complexities, together with certain contemporary unsettling historical processes (globalisation, postmodernism, new information and communication technologies, environmental changes, etc.) have gotten rid of some old certainties (progress, development, absolute truth) an empty space is created that begs to be filled. This is where the competing visions for social and educational reform and transformation start vying for dominance, and the fertile ground for (physically and epistemologically) violent conflicts gets created.

As these changes are profound and deeply unsettling they strike into the heart of what we (humans) – individually and collectively - are about. The fundamental perennial questions about the nature of the world and ourselves apparently resolved during periods of perceived certainty have to be dealt with and ultimately answered yet again.

In terms of providing answers to these questions and resolving newly arrived uncertainties three main movements that incorporate three different visions for local and global futures are currently apparent in Australia and indeed all over the western (industrially overdeveloped) world.

These three main visions are: 1. Bringing back the old/Religious fundamentalism. 2. Continuing Enlightenment paradigm/Secular progressivism (whether modern or postmodern) and 3. Eupsychia (perfection and liberation of self) + conscious human evolution/Critical spirituality.

I next summarise the first two visions and then focus on the third possibility for our future, especially in terms of Tantric, Vedic and Buddhist influences and the potential of this worldviews to engage with critical pedagogies and present issues and dilemmas.

## **Vision 1: Religious fundamentalism/Back to the past Vision**

This is one (global) response to (global, regional, local, personal) uncertainties. It is the most visible, the loudest and the crudest. It is one way to live and one way to answer perennial questions. Obviously, this movement satisfies certain human needs for connection, stability, security. In terms of the Indian episteme, it satisfies the needs of the three lower chakras (*muladhara*, *svadhisthana* and *manipura chakras* presiding primarily over the physical body). These include the needs related to fundamental survival, emotions and sexuality, and personal/group power.

In Australia the most outspoken groups with this particular vision for the future are liberal conservatives, born again Christians, One Nation and Family First members and other conservative groups firmly embedded within white, western, fundamental(ist) Christian worldview. Their vision for the future includes:

1. Revival of the old, tested through times, the traditional. The literal interpretation of the religious text is the only way for human salvation.
2. Bringing back the focus on idealised family (nuclear, hierarchical, authoritarian);
3. Cardboard masculinity and femininity (includes glorification of hyper masculinity, mysoginia and homophobia, anti-abortion stance);
4. (One) nation building/vision for ‘all Australians’. This includes a nation defined in strict and ‘has been’ terms wherein compassion is put on a back seat when it comes down to ‘the others’. For example, refugees/asylum seekers are considered a potential threat to “the security and health of Australians.” ([http://www.familyfirst.org.au/hot\\_topics/httopics.php](http://www.familyfirst.org.au/hot_topics/httopics.php));
5. Monoculture (society, environment, mind) and closing of boarders/putting up of (physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural) fence to protect ‘us’ from ‘them’. This includes a commitment to:  
“winning the war against terror... the need for careful deployment of our armed forces, in co-operation with allies and the international community.” ([http://www.familyfirst.org.au/hot\\_topics/httopics.php](http://www.familyfirst.org.au/hot_topics/httopics.php))

This vision is intimately linked with the “back to the basics” demands in education: focusing on 3 Rs (reading, writing, arithmetic) and the passing of ‘the truth’. For example, conservative education commentator and journalist Andrew Bolt summarises this position beautifully in his article “*Give us the Truth: Teach but Don’t Preach*” (*The Sunday Mail*, 9th May, 2004):

“I should worry when teachers preach, not teach, about the “stolen generations”, for example. Or about global warming, asylum seekers, Iraq or our history, and all those other emotional subjects where they make it seem rude to ask for the facts.”

And:

“I feel cheated and deceived by our education system. ... every single handout painted Western countries ... as some kind of big, evil polluting Satans responsible for a largely natural process. Then in English, teachers would continuously show their anti-war bias when we studied media texts.”

In another article (The Sunday Mail, Sept 19, 2004, p. 51) he takes issue with Australian multiculturalism, blaming it for the deterioration and the collapse of a school:

“The death’ of Melbourne’s Moreland City College ... the reason ... the answer ... fashionably multicultural school ... increasing number of Middle Eastern children who went there made to feel at home ... their parent’s old home and not their new Australian one ... to make a tough situation worse, its discipline and academic standards were left to slide ... No doubt, the students at both Moreland and School X also got the usual teaching about Australia and its past, about our ‘genocide’, our ‘stolen generations’ and our ‘racism’ ... is it smart to let poorer state schools become dominated by a minority culture and turned into ghettos ... are we asserting our values and our core culture strongly enough? ... enforcing rules of civilised behaviour ... discipline, rigour, a little prudishness and belief in Australia and respect for its rituals ...”

The sound understanding of “Australian heritage and culture” (not heritages and cultures) is also part of Family First vision of education.

(<http://www.familyfirst.org.au/policy/education061004.pdf>) Ultimately, the perennial answers about the nature of the world and humans are answered through creationism, ‘original sin’, and the battle between good and evil. The way out is to accept the top down hierarchy and the strict interpretation of ‘the truth’ as defined by those that hold (social and religious) power.

### **Implications for education**

Thus while other elements of this vision may also include: holistic development of children, reduction of class size and the equality of access to education ([www.familyfirst.org.au](http://www.familyfirst.org.au)) this is to be done within a framework that is, in essence, exclusionary of “the other”, different and foreign.

Indeed, multiplicity and exposure to multiple worldviews themselves may be seen as a problem. As expressed by the USA based Rabbi:

If I were a Jewish parent sending my kids to public school, not only would I not want the teacher to preach the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, I wouldn't even want the teacher to say that all religions are equal. I'm prepared to teach my child that all religions are equally deserving of respect, but not that they are all equally valid. If my child were to come home and say, "According to school, one religion is as good as another and therefore it doesn't make any difference whether I observe my religion or some other,' I would feel undermined as a parent. (Kushner, 1999, pp. 20-21)

So while in Australia many, including state schools, incorporate this teaching *about* the religion(s), back to the basics vision demands the continuation of teaching *in* the religion (as is currently the constitutional right in Queensland and which applies to both religious and state schools).

The key words used within this discourse are those of a “character development”, “core culture”, “nation’s future”, “pursuit of excellence”, “parental choice in education”, “control/accountability” that ultimately get translated into the everyday praxis as exclusionary practices of whatever is seen not to belong to the mainstream

(family, religion, worldview, sexuality, culture). The level of tolerance towards different/evil/perverse is low and the compassion is oriented towards the sameness (towards those that think and act as I/we do).

Other elements of this Back to the Basics vision/demands for a particular future include:

1. For educational *process*: firmness, discipline, standardisation, teachers as trainers and dispensers of basics and accumulated established truths;
2. For educational *structure*: stern, functional, basic, symbols that promote dominant views and values displayed;
3. For educational *content*: focus on ‘the truth’ as defined by the most powerful social group, non-negotiability of curriculum or very limited negotiability.

Schools of course remain vehicles for building values of hyper-patriotism and nationality, idealised family and the alleged 1950s social cohesion. Another common, not always openly stated but definitely underlying assumption is that control and accountability are to be exercised within ‘power over’ and ‘peace through strength’ conceptual framework. Especially during the time of perceived crisis and chaos, society and education are to return to ‘common sense’ approaches in terms of disciplining disobedience, both among adults (punitive measures, imprisonment) and the children (corporal punishment/pro-slapping initiatives).

As illustrated in the last year’s debate in regard to school violence and the ability of teachers to discipline students, suggestion in regard to what might improve the situation included (Sydney Morning Herald, July, 2003):

“Bring back corporal punishment. It works in most Asian countries...”

“The cane, strap, belt, ruler. Works wonders. There wasn’t any violence when I was at school (*sic!*).”

“Bring back the cane. How demoralising is it for a good kid to see the repeat offenders get away with bad behaviour.”

“Parents won’t do their jobs and raise their children properly...”

“Government took away parenting powers from parents long time ago...”

“We have the problem where troublemaking kids are allowed to stay in school when they simply should be booted out. The aim should be to stop Neanderthals from breeding full stop.”

These views that consist of blaming and that express the desire for firmness, discipline and authoritarianism fit very well into the worldview of what Michael Apple calls “new alliance” and a “new power bloc” (Apple, 2000, p. 226). This new power bloc that has formed in the USA in particular and in developed western countries, including Australia, in general:

. . . combines multiple fractions of capital that are committed to neoliberal marketized solution to educational problems, neoconservative intellectuals who want a ‘return’ to higher standards and a ‘common culture’, authoritarian, populist, religious fundamentalists who are deeply worried about secularity and the preservation of their own traditions, and particular fractions of the professionally oriented new middle class who are committed to the ideology and techniques of accountability, measurement, and ‘management’. (ibid.)

This includes a particular vision of a “dynamic, productive, flexible, truly competitive and efficient industry, farms and business”(http://www.familyfirst.org.au, emphasis mine).

In conclusion, and most importantly, this new power block has utilised a particular image of the romantic past to fill in the vacuum created by the disintegration of the old and the lack of articulation of new futures narratives. As argued by Apple (ibid.):

Its [new alliance’s] overall aims are in providing the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit, and discipline and for returning us to *a romanticized past* [italics added] of the ‘ideal’ home, family, and school.

This vision – pushed predominantly by fundamentalist Christians and various neo-conservatives in places such as North America and Australia but by various other fundamentalist/conservatives in different parts of the world – is extremely problematic from both the Buddhist and critical education perspective/worldview. The main point of contention/fear is that ultimately such vision would create society that cannot move forward, that defines ‘normality’ in very narrow and strict terms, and that limits compassion to what’s close and familiar. As well, that such interpretation of human history, present and the future incorporates the view of children either in terms of ‘tabula rasa’ that is to be filled with ‘the truth’ or in terms of unruly deviance/lower development that is to be disciplined/brought into (one standard fits all) adulthood.

Given that this vision has a long history within the west/in western Europe it comes as no surprise that many historically progressive educators saw critical secularism as the main way out of this (religious fundamentalist) paradigm. Enlightenment/secular progressivism is also often seen as being able to address the demands of our changing societies through the focus on rational, empirical and verifiable. Thus it is the rising of scepticism, questioning and secularism (helped by modern science and postmodern philosophy) that is seen to be able to both address current issues as well as to oppose historical and contemporary rise in religious fervour, fanaticism and dogma.

## **Vision 2: Secular progressivism (modern and postmodern)**

Rather than going back to the past for guidance, continuing Enlightenment paradigm focuses on the future. Western philosophical orientations such as evolutionism, euhronic utopianism and progressivism reflect this view of ‘salvation’ not in the after life (in heaven) but in the after (present) time (on Earth, eventually). This doctrine of secular salvation is via human rationality, especially science (Lather, 2001, p.33) and, of course, through education. Historically, it is possible to trace the invention of this idea:

Before the late eighteenth century, history had been interpreted as being cyclic and thus repetitious. The late Enlightenment produced several thinkers who made the Age of Reason’s implicit notion of the idea of progress explicit and placed it in a novel time–forward scheme that challenged the notion of cycles. The shift in utopian approaches

from a future ideal place to a future ideal time – euchronia – marked a major departure from the traditions begun by Thomas More and prepared the way for the revolutionary era ahead. (Hollis 1998: 78)

Both evolutionism and utopianism imply that “social institutions can be rationally transformed in ways that enhance human wellbeing and happiness” but they disagree about how and how fast change is to be achieved (Wright,1999). While evolutionists focus on piecemeal change and slow, incremental modifications (ibid), utopians, on the other hand, focus on “wholesale ruptures”, grand designs for social reconstruction, conscious design, rational calculation and political will (ibid).

The current mainstream educational model, also referred to as ‘modern education’, grew out of the debate and out of the tension between the previously mentioned main approaches to social change – utopianism, evolutionism and progressivism. It replaced the previous dominant educational model, which can best be described as a *religious model* of education, having finally won the centuries old battle. The ‘educated’ person of the twentieth century finally became “an effect of teachable knowledge, not an effect of divine dispensation or natural evolution” (Fendler 1999: 40). This new scientific, secular and rationalist discourse was based on an alternative vision of the future and an alternative reading of the past. The paradigm of evolution eventually replaced the paradigm of Creation, reason faith, empirical evidence the Truth of God, scientific inquiry the given text that is to be memorised, and so on. The particular vision of the future, as progressive movement from the past and present rather than as regress from the Golden Age, which better served the needs of a more secular, scientific, industrial civilisation, also ‘won’.

### **Secular modern/ism: educational implications**

Other elements of modern/ist education include:

1. For educational *process*: process standardised even when ‘child centred’, outcomes measured through certain technical means (eg various tests), top-down, teachers as dispensers of legitimate knowledge.
2. For educational *structure*: mass education in mostly formalised educational settings.
3. For educational *content*: Objective reality could be discovered through reason and is accessible through language; world was created in Big Bang and will end with Big Crash but in between humans can evolve their societies; division of educational disciplines, normative interpretation of facts, values, truths.

Ultimately, the educated subject is defined through rational thought (I think therefore I am) with the unified, fixed subjectivity. Education and knowledge are seen as inherently liberating and emancipating, thus focus on consciousness raising and ‘correct’ socialisation.

Foucault, on the other hand, saw educated modernist subject in terms of ‘governmentality’ (deployment of normalising/surveillance techniques) and ‘technologies of the self’ (internalised gaze within nodes of power/knowledge). Foucault’s assertion is that the structure and organisation of schooling firmly locate bodies and minds in place. By the teaching of particular knowledge and skills that is based on educational regimes of truth, a particular subject is always developed on the

basis of these normalising regimes. The governed subject becomes the self-regulated subject, therefore successfully fulfilling “the practical needs of schools, businesses, and society as a whole for discipline and order” (Cromer, 1997, p. 118). As a result, “systems that had been developed by reformers to restructure society were adopted by society to maintain the social order” (ibid.).

These (modernist) traditions have been and remain very powerful. The key modernist idea of progress, for example, has remained a narrative educators from both the Left and Right ends of the political spectrum shared. As argued by Popkewitz, until very recently, both still relied on “modernist notions of progress to justify their theoretical, empirical, and political strategies” (Popkewitz 1998: xiii). This has been done without reflective examination and with “almost missionary zeal” in order to obtain the ‘salvation’ of the masses through education (ibid: xiv). These narratives have been the cornerstone of many influential theoretical positions from Marxism and Neo-Marxism, to feminism, postcolonial and critical theory.

Another shared assumption was the ‘social justice’ discourse that can also be historically traced:

The birth of the concept of social justice coincided with two other shifts in human consciousness: the “death of God” and the rise of the ideal of the command economy. When God “died,” people began to trust a conceit of reason and its inflated ambition to do what even God had not deigned to do: construct a just social order. The divinization of reason found its extension in the command economy; reason (that is, science) would command and humankind would collectively follow. The death of God, the rise of science, and the command economy yielded “scientific socialism.” Where reason would rule, the intellectuals would rule. (Novak, 2000, 11-13)

Another problem with the modernist progressivism – as expressed through social justice discourse – is that virtue is ascribed to social systems thus denoting a regulative principle of order – ultimately, the focus is not virtue but power argues Novak (ibid.):

From this line of reasoning it follows that “social justice” would have its natural end in a command economy in which individuals are told what to do, so that it would always be possible to identify those in charge and to hold them responsible. This notion presupposes that people are guided by specific external directions rather than internalized, personal rules of just conduct. It further implies that no individual should be held responsible for his relative position. To assert that he *is* responsible would be “blaming the victim.” It is the function of “social justice” to blame somebody else, to blame *the system*, to blame those who (mythically) “control” it. As Leszek Kolakowski wrote in his magisterial history of communism, the fundamental paradigm of Communist ideology is guaranteed to have wide appeal: *you suffer; your suffering is caused by powerful others; these oppressors must be destroyed.*

Many of the underlying assumptions informing the work of ‘progressive’ educators have thus been challenged in our times. One answer was the development of postmodernism – variously referred to as either a new historical and cultural era or as a new worldview and theoretical perspective. Often referred as the era that comes ‘after’ modernism (see Lather’s 1991 ‘Charting Postmodernism’ and the division of

all history into premodern, modern and postmodern) this reference to postmodernism as a new stage in history promotes a decisively modern classification.

In any case, postmodern condition of knowledge is to provide the ‘incredulity toward modernist meta-narratives’ (Lyotard, 1993, p. xxiv) and a critique that:

“rejects Enlightenment totalizing theories and cultural stories which, as framed in modernist narratives, explained the world from a centred and privileged position[s]” (Luke, 1998, p. 23).

This scepticism towards modernist meta-narratives has lead postmodernists to question modernist attempts to totalise and unify a heterogenous and diverse world, attempts that are either based on ‘laws of nature’ or ‘laws of history’. Instead, postmodernists argue for multiple sites from which the world is perceived and theorised. Postmodernism argues for “multiplicity, difference, heteroglossia and specificity” (ibid.). Furthermore, postmodernism argues against any notions of ‘objective reality’ and ‘objective truth’ that can be discovered through ‘reason’ and correctly applied methods of scientific inquiry.

Postmodernism aimed to transform such modernist hegemonic and dominating tendencies by emphasising:

...plurality of ethnicities, cultures, genders, truths, realities, sexualities, even reasons, and argu[ing] that no one type should be privileged over others. In its concern to demolish all privilege, postmodernism seeks a more equal representation of class, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and culture. (Sardar, 1998, pp.10-11)

### **Secular postmodern/ism: educational implications**

Although staying away of prescribing it is possible to deduct desired education, as defined by postmodernists. Some of the elements include:

1. For educational *process*: constructionist, open text and reader/centred, focus on interpretations, ideally dialogical and democratic
2. For educational *structure*: situated, contingent/partial/in flux, use of new information and communication technologies
3. For educational *content*: Reality always negotiated, interdisciplinary, focus on micro narratives and what is missing from the mainstream discourse, multi-literacies, multiple intelligences, “multiple sites from which the world is spoken” (Lather, 1991, p. 33)

The human subject is no longer seen in terms of essential ontology but as product of discourse, regimes of knowledge and regimes of truth.

Ever since Foucault (1977) initially reconceptualised schools as institutions of surveillance, discipline and control, and aligned them together with factories, armies and prisons, postmodernist scholars have questioned education’s role in continuing and enhancing the modernist project. Most importantly, postmodernism has abandoned a positivistic search for ‘facts’ as constitutive of knowledge, and has challenged the modernist belief that knowledge is in itself inherently emancipating and liberating. Rather, knowledge is seen as ‘constructed’ rather than ‘discovered’

and is also seen as a method of surveillance and discipline. For Foucault, truth is not “the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 72). Truth is never outside of power or lacking in power. Instead, it is “a thing of this world” (ibid.). Therefore, each society has its own “regimes of truth”, its general “politics of truth” which in effect are a type of “discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (ibid., p. 73). What counts as knowledge to be included in the curriculum is not so much the result of ‘objective evidence’ but of negotiations between various social groups.

The postmodern thesis that everything is relative caused a major problem when trying to assert that something, anything is in some distinctive way itself (Sardar, 1998, p.13). Furthermore:

In a world without “Truth” or “Reason”—or any other grand narrative such as “Morality”, “God”, “Tradition” and “History”—there is nothing that “can remotely provide us with meaning, [and] with a sense of direction” (Sardar, 1998 p. 10)

This lack of meaning, lack of sense of direction emerges as most postmodernists, “in the tradition of Foucault . . . generally refuse to offer a vision of the future” (Fendler, 1999, p.185). Unlike modernists, they believe that offering *a vision* “such as providing a solution, ideal or utopian hope . . . would set limits on possibilities for the future” (ibid.). In addition, they believe that offering a vision of the future means “to assume a position of political authority (intellectual as centre)” which is a position that is generally declined on “ethical grounds” (ibid.).

This causes yet another problem – of postmodernism leading itself to form “a nihilistic cluster of philosophical perspectives which are built upon a sense of finality rather than of beginnings” (Hughes, 1994, p.8). This finality, of dismantled modernity and current postmodernity as the stage of finality, uncannily resembles Hegelian and Marxist ‘end of history’. As modernist reality destroyed not by alternative visions but “by the collapse of all visions” (Giddens, 1992, p. 21) this helped create an environment in which “everything goes, but nothing much counts” (ibid). Thus a ‘political paralysis’ at the Left end of the political spectrum (McLaren 1998) and the ability of ‘new [conservative] power block’, ‘new alliance’ (Apple, 2000) to assert its current hegemony.

To conclude, the secular modernist vision has been destabilised by both its inherent contradictions as well as by postmodernism. Postmodernism, on the other hand, while powerful deconstructing tool fell short in offering viable alternative that can: a) make sense to the people outside of the Academia, b) address the perennial desire to save (whether through secular or religious means) our selves and c) provide a counter narrative to religious dogmatism.

In short, progressive secularism seems to fail to address the needs of the human spirit while religious fundamentalism fails to address the needs of human society to move forward. Is there a third way?

### **Vision 3: Critical Pedagogy meets Alternative Spirituality**

Critical spirituality is a concept that aims to transcend the two previously mentioned poles. It intends to do this by incorporating both the rational and empirical with the somatic, the meditative (Bussey, 2000) and the devotional. This concept acknowledges the reality that humans are spiritual beings but asserts that wider knowledge and understanding of various spiritual traditions and their contemporary developments are crucial in our times. Furthermore, these traditions are seen not as primarily distinct (and/or 'right'/'wrong') but in terms of their reciprocity. Another crucial assertion of the new spirituality is that spirituality is seen as a work in progress rather than a statement of absolute, never changeable truths.

Implications of this concept for critical pedagogy are numerous. As Parker Palmer (1998) argues the spiritual is always present in all (including public) education, whether it is acknowledged or not. The difference is how is the spiritual to be. As seen in the first vision, spiritual issues can be approached in a way that impedes critical thinking and reflectivity (education *in* religion). Alternatively, spiritual issues can be thought as separated from human subjects, as externalised object of inquiry (education *about* religions). The new spirituality movement is, on the other hand, about education *through* the experience of the spiritual. It is accepted that this experience can be achieved through a variety of means and pathways, and that, ultimately it is the journey (full of trials and errors) that counts. Thus critical spirituality approaches crucially correspond with the main aims of critical pedagogy – fostering of critical thinking skills, questioning of the hegemonic discourses, development of critical consciousness, transformation of society (and self), and so on. Before I develop this further it is important to connect the latest trend towards “New Spirituality” (Walsch, 2004) with the idea of ‘holistic’ education, as these two terms correlated but also differ.

Holistic education argues that education should cultivate the physical, psychological, emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions of a learner. Holistic education is spiritual, because spirituality is its integral part. Spiritual education focuses on the relation the individual has with the universe/collective consciousness. Spiritual education is holistic in that it is “encompassing all of life” (Erricker and Erricker, 2001, p. xi). As Ron Miller and Yves Bertrand explain about holistic and spiritual approaches:

Throughout the 200-year history of public schooling, a widely scattered group of critics have pointed out that the education of young human beings should involve much more than simply moulding them into future workers or citizens. The Swiss humanitarian Johann Pestalozzi, the American Transcendentalists Thoreau, Emerson and Alcott, the founders of "progressive" education--Francis Parker and John Dewey--and pioneers such as Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, among others, all insisted that education should be understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the developing child. During the 1970s, an emerging body of literature in science, philosophy and cultural history provided an overarching concept to describe this way of understanding education--a perspective known as *holism*. A holistic way of thinking seeks to encompass and integrate multiple layers of meaning and

experience rather than defining human possibilities narrowly. Every child is more than a future employee; every person's intelligence and abilities are far more complex than his or her scores on standardized tests. (R. Miller, 2000, para. 1)

In the past twenty-five years, we have witnessed a very strong resurgence of this spiritualistic movement. Industrialized civilization has failed to fulfil a fundamental human need to understand our presence on Earth . . . People have always wondered: “Does life have a meaning?” Hence the proliferation of spiritualistic movements that answer positively: “Yes, there is another world, an unnameable world with a thousand names that we must experience.” The goal of spiritualistic education is to familiarize the individual with this spiritual reality—also-called mystical or metaphysical. (Bertrand, 1995, p. 9)

Although these two concepts are closely connected there is an important distinction between holistic and spiritual education, argues Marcus Bussey (1996, p. 3). The way holistic education has developed so far has been “ . . . too much in the head and not enough in the heart. It was bound up with ‘shoulds’ that were wonderful but lacked the transformative forces to shift people into a discourse that actively promoted a condition of self transformation” (ibid.). Bussey’s take on the central question in this seminar – why most pedagogies that have been recently developed as a response to ‘new times’ fall short when principles are to be translated into practice – would be that our current values and habits are ingrained in such a way that it is difficult to simply “become holistic” (ibid.). Because holism did not contain within itself a deep commitment to an integrative spiritual practice, continues Bussey (ibid.) it has “met a dead end”. Without consistent reflective work no deep transformation of our consciousness can occur, the holistic platform remains rhetoric. It is a commitment to spiritual practice, concludes Bussey (ibid.) that is “the only way to fill the hole in holism, or, to put it another way, put the whole into holism”.

However, many holistic educators would agree with Bussey’s (ibid.) assertion that “transformative process can only come about through sustained meditative reflection”. For example, one of the leading theorists on holistic education, John Miller (1999, p. 48), has recently argued:

In holistic learning, teachers must also nurture their own deeper selves. I encourage teachers to set aside time during the day to develop their inner life. Activities like gardening and meditation allow us to make the transition from a calculating to a listening mind. Another technique is mindfulness.

The crucial difference as compared to traditional religions is that these techniques are more flexible than ritualised and that techniques are used not in terms of denial and suppression (of ‘bad parts of human nature’) but in terms of channelling (replacing with more beneficial).

Before I proceed any further in exploring connections between critical spirituality and critical pedagogy it is also crucial to distinguish this new emergent spirituality from

the religious fundamentalism and education in religion or even education about religion.

As discussed earlier, religious education is mostly concerned with handing down a particular given truth, particular religious tradition and knowledge. As argued by Laukhuf and Werner (1998), religion is the service and adoration of God expressed in forms of worship; it refers to an external formalised system of beliefs, values, codes of conduct and rituals—it is a codified set of morals. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a very personal and individual value system about the way that people approach life, varying from person to person and changing throughout a person's life (ibid.). While religion is “a specific way of exercising that spirituality and usually requires an institutional affiliation”, spirituality does not require an institutional connection (Nodding, 1999). According to Palmer (1999b), it is about:

. . . the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos—with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive.

Religion not only attempts to institutionalise spirituality, in many instances this is done “for the perpetuation of the institution rather than for the explicit welfare of the individual” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 260). Unfortunately, spirituality has, in our times, been seriously compromised by its identification with institutional religions, argues O’Sullivan (p. 259). This is problematic because spirituality is neither religion nor is it in the sole province of religion (ibid., p. 260). As Krishnamurti (1995, p. 25) also argues, spirituality “does not belong to any cult, to any group, to any religion, to any organised church”. The spiritual mind:

Is not the Hindu mind, the Christian mind, the Buddhist mind, or the Muslim mind . . . [it] does not belong to any group which calls itself religious . . . [it] is not the mind that goes to churches, temples, mosque . . . nor it holds to certain forms of beliefs, dogmas . . . It is a mind that has seen through the falsity of churches, dogmas, beliefs, traditions. Not being nationalistic, not being conditioned by its environment, such a mind has no horizons, no limits. (ibid.)

The mystic notion of God may be replaced “by the more philosophical notion of truth and still the discovery will remain essentially the same” (The Mother, 1965, p. 23). From a spiritual perspective, religions are problematic because “as they are taught and practiced today [they] lead to conflict rather than unity” (Gandhi, in Cenkner, 1976, p. 113). Because of fractionism brought by religions, Tagore, Aurobindo and others argue that religions should best not be officially taught, but ‘the truths’ common to all religions could and should be taught to all children (Cenkner, 1976). According to Palmer (1999b), however, spirituality is less about teaching truths than about helping with articulating and thinking about particular questions. He argues that people rarely raise spiritual issues, partly because of “the embarrassed silence that may greet us if we ask our real questions aloud” (Palmer, 1999b). But also, another, perhaps even more significant reason why people don’t ask these questions is because someone will try to give them “The Answer” (ibid.). Spirituality is not about answers but about questions such as:

“Does my life have meaning and purpose?” “Do I have gifts that the world wants and needs?” “Whom and what can I trust?” “How can I

rise above my fears?” “How do I deal with suffering, my own and that of my family and friends?” “How does one maintain hope?” “What about death?” . . . “How shall I live today knowing that someday I will die?”. (ibid.)

Spirituality is therefore primarily concerned with “a personal interpretation of life and the inner resource of people” (Laukhuf & Werner, 1998). In its “broadest sense, spirituality is the manifestation of the spirit, just as physiology is one manifestation of the body and emotions are a manifestation of the mind” (ibid.). It is “at the core of the individual’s existence, integrity” transcending “the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social dimension” (Landrum and associates, quoted in Laukhuf & Werner, 1998).

This new interpretation of spiritual is absolutely crucial for our times argues O’Sullivan (1999). If the ecological paradigm is to replace the modernist, industrial one, if we are to move towards “a global planetary education”, it will be necessary to have “a functional cosmology that is in line with the vision of where this education will be leading us” (1999, p. 45). The newly developing ecological (and we could add here also postmodern dialogical) community needs “a mystique”, even “the great liturgy” (ibid., p. 186). This could be found in the renewal of “human association with the great cosmic liturgy in the diurnal sequence of dawn and sunset as well as the great seasonal sequence” (ibid.). Parker Palmer (1999b) also argues that it is through the universal connection with nature that spirituality may be approached. For example:

Seasonal metaphors offer a way to raise deep questions about life without blinking, while honoring the sensibilities of everyone from Jews to Buddhists, from Muslims to secular humanists, from Christians to those whose spirituality has no name. When we raise such questions in the context of safe space and trustworthy relationships, the soul can speak its truth—and people can hear that truth in themselves and in one another with transforming effect. (ibid., pp. 6–11)

In terms of the emergence of this new cosmology we are in the midst of profound changes – an option is emerging that is a real alternative to both the religious fundamentalism and secular progressivism. As argued by Tacey (2003, back cover):

We are in the midst of a spiritual revolution. Churches are emptying and traditional forms of faith are being abandoned. Meanwhile interest in a more personal spiritual experience, ranging from exploring indigenous religions and long-forgotten mysterious sects and cultures, to seeking spirituality in nature, has never been greater.

“The coming of a Spiritual Age” (Aurobindo, 1962, p. 353) has by now become so obvious that we are in the midst of ‘the spiritual revolution’ (Tacey, 2003). This spiritual revolution is:

...a spontaneous movement in society, a new interest in the reality of spirit and its healing effects on life, health, community and well-being. It is our secular society realising that it has been running on empty, and has to restore itself at a deep, primal source, a source which is beyond humanity and yet paradoxically at the very core of our experience. It is our recognition that we have outgrown the ideals and values of the early scientific era, which viewed the individual as a sort of efficient machine. We now have to revise our

concepts of life, society, and progress, while preserving the advances that technology and science have given us. Significantly, the new revolution is found at the heart of the new sciences, where recent discoveries in physics, biology, psychology, and ecology have begun to restore dignity to previously discredited spiritual visions of reality. Science itself has experienced its own revolution of the spirit, and is no longer arraigned against spirituality in the old way. (Tacey, 2003, p. 1)

The new, emergent 'God' is markedly different from the God often imagined within Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, if conceptualised at all. That is, the word has come to signify "a nonanthropomorphized, genderless entity, equivalent to the sum total of matter or energy in the universe" (Torgovnick, 1997, p. 175). Similarly, Trenoweth (1995, p. ix) writes:

As often as not, our God today is androgynous and increasingly our God sides more solidly with the oppressed than the oppressor. Our God is a shape-shifter. When we envisage God, she is as likely to be the colour of chocolate as the colour of snow and might sit high on a cloud or lie curled beneath the earth, birthing the forests, the animals, the mountains, the oceans and, over and again, the human generations. Or perhaps, as the Dalai Lama would have it, we envisage no God at all, for the one true reality lies in blissful emptiness, perfect place.

To replace heavily laden term, God is being replaced with more 'neutral' words such as the older concepts or "collective consciousness" (Jung) and "noosphere" (Teilhard de Chardin) or more recent concepts such as "Source" and "Being". "Believing" is also replaced by terms such as "Journey" or sacred "pathway". The terms spiritual and spirituality are also redefined:

In the new cultural paradigm, which has been taking shape for some time, 'spirituality' bursts free from its former confinement, and becomes a much larger field of human activity. 'Spirituality' is the new, broad, umbrella term ..., [that] refers to our relationship with the sacredness of life, nature, and the universe... (Tacey, 2003:38)

In line with 'postmodern' developments one of the main characteristics of this new spirituality is its inclusiveness – "covering all pathways that lead to meaning and purpose" (Tacey, 2003:38). In sum new spirituality has become "diverse, plural, manifold, and seems to have countless forms of expression" (ibid.). Furthermore it is centrally concerned with 'the other(s)' as its goal is "connectedness and relatedness to other realities and existences, including other people, society, the world, the stars, the universe and the holy" (ibid.).

Another main characteristic of this new spirituality is its anti-dogmatism that goes hand in hand with all inclusiveness. Inspired by Buddha's and other spiritual teachers' insistence to examine their teachings and test the efficiency of the teaching by ourselves and for ourselves, adherents of new spirituality no longer accept certain claims just because the authority says it is so. As exemplified in the classic Kalama Sutra (known as the "Buddhist Charter of Free Enquiry") the links with the critical pedagogy are all too obvious:

Don't accept ideas just because others have believed them for a long time or because others say that it is true. Don't accept these ideas just because they are

written in ancient books or scriptures. Don't accept these ideas just because the teacher offers a convincing argument. Don't accept these ideas just because you have great respect for the teacher. ... You should examine these ideas for yourself and ask yourself if they are of benefit to your life, are not a source of sorrow or regrets or likely to bring blame from the wise. If these ideas are profitable to your life and are unlikely to cause suffering to yourself or any living creature and are praised by intelligent people and are likely to produce happiness, then, and only then, should you accept them and live according to these principles. (Shakyamuni Buddha, in Kalama Sutra, quoted by Lyall, 2004).

And while all this may be new it is also very old. As argued by Bertrand (1995, p. 9) "the spiritualistic educational movement is probably one of the oldest on the planet. Like the tide, it always returns." Not only is the spiritual education movement arguably one of the oldest approaches in education, it is also one of the most widely found—throughout history and human societies. According to Bertrand (1995, p. 11), the idea of spiritual vision of/for the world stems from "Platonism and Neo-Platonism, from Hinduism and the Oriental religious philosophies such as Taoism and Zen". The main sources that the recent spiritual renewal draws upon are, according to him, religions, metaphysics, Eastern philosophies, mysticism, Taoism, Buddhism, perennial philosophy and the concept of cosmic consciousness (ibid., p. 223). But there is, of course, an indigenous approach to spirituality (apparently 'out of bounds' for non-indigenous researchers and educators: Craven et al., 1999, p. 240), as well as feminist spirituality (eg, Plaskow and Christ, 1989), 'postmodern' *Quantum Spirituality* (Sweet, 1991); "secular" (Miller & Nakagawa, 2002, p. v) or "critical" (Bussey, 2000a) spirituality. Lastly, in addition to these approaches to spirituality, each of the three major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—also includes a 'softer', mystical and spiritual orientation (eg. Green, 1989; Pourrat 1922-27; McGinn & Meyendorff, 1989; Nasr, 1989).

### **Implications for education**

The implications of this new emergent spirituality to education are numerous. As the body of literature exploring these implications is enormous, I will limit myself to raising several crucial points. The main intervention/implication in the area of the education:

1. For educational *process*: education comes from within; education cultivates inner peace, harmony and balance, be the change you want to see.
2. For educational *structure*: in traditional and alternative settings, throughout and through life.
3. For educational *content*: focus on human and cosmic unity, spirituality explored and thought, promotes cardinal human values, aims of education one with the aims of life.

Compared to the first two visions the main difference between the new spirituality and religious fundamentalism is the insistence on anti-dogmatism, direct spiritual experience and inclusiveness of the former. Most importantly, flexibility in re-interpreting perennial spiritual 'laws' in the context of contemporary historical moment, focus on dialogical and interpretative, removes conditions for promoting social conservatism – the feature all too apparent among religious fundamentalists.

In short, three main characteristics of new spirituality are a) inclusiveness – everyone is essentially spiritual, with Buddha nature within; b) non-literalism, change through experience and dialogue is possible; and c) the importance of inner practice and direct spiritual experience.

The second vision enables social progress but as it is informed by secularism it neglects inner spiritual dimension – desire for inner peace and salvation in the now. As well, while postmodernism discovers the same law as Buddha and New Spirituality – the perpetual change and impermanence – it does not suggest what to do with this insight. In the context of new spirituality, the discovery of impermanence/ever-present change is utilised to help bodhichitta [the mind that aspires to enlightenment] develop wisdom and eternalise the perennial ethics of love, compassion and altruism. New spirituality places responsibility for one's salvation on these internal processes rather than on something external to one's self (social intervention in the 2<sup>nd</sup> vision or God's Grace in the 1<sup>st</sup>). Whether achieved here and now or in thousand of aeons, the Buddha state – the enlightenment – is both possible and the responsibility of each and every person. Thus the credo: To save the world we first must save ourselves. In Buddhism, this is to be achieved through means such as:

For the development of wisdom: Right Understanding/View/Perspective and Right Thought/Intention/Resolve;

For the development of morality, for ethical conduct: Right Speech, Action and Livelihood;

For mental development: Right Effort/Endeavour, Mindfulness and Right Concentration (mediation and intuitive insight).

Ultimately, the salvation is not only for our own fun and enjoyment but ultimately for the sake of all sentient beings (Pabongka Rinpoche, 1991, p. 35). Utopianism and individualism as well as critical thinking and the devotion – no longer separate – can be simultaneously put into practice.

Education finally needs to start with ourselves, and ourselves alone. This is because:

By ourselves is evil done; by ourselves we pain endure. By ourselves we cease from ill; by ourselves become we pure. No one can save us but ourselves, no one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the Path. (Dharmapada, quoted in Lyall, 2004)

## **Conclusion**

The three distinct contemporary movements/three different visions for local and global futures explored in this text are to be understood in terms of Max Weber's 'ideal models'. While some elements of each could be found among the others, each represents a particular way to answer perennial questions of who we are, why we are here and where should we be going. While all three are at one level just a way to live/understand the world at another they are differently positioned in terms of where we, a human species, may be going. It is my view that the direction chosen amongst these three to remain/become new guiding narrative will determine the quality of lives of many future generations to come. And even though first two alternatives do satisfy certain basic human needs for humanity to move forward we desperately need the third story, and beyond.

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