

Why A New Dream?

Reading Time: 20-25 minutes

The why's are legion and many of them will be further explored in *Section 4: Our Moment*, but to sum them up, we may become the only species in the long, nearly four billion years of life on earth to consciously devastate or even extinct ourselves through destroying the habitats and ecosystems we depend upon to exist. Ironically, while this is happening, we consider ourselves superior to every other species on the planet, we're still warring with one another at every level and apparently waiting for the dominant economic system of market capitalism to save the day, through technology or some other *invisible hand* of economics or system of "management", such as AI and transhumanism.

The inevitable problems of the loss of biodiversity, cultural diversity and intact ecosystems are a result of the effluent of our industrial growth society. This includes the proliferation of man-made toxic chemicals in the environment, from nuclear waste to glyphosate, PFAS "forever" chemicals and micro plastics to an ever-growing number of antibiotics. The harmful effects on the health of our own species as well as the health of the planet is only slowly beginning to dawn into our mainstream awareness even as we continue "business as usual", literally. While climate change and global warming are capturing most of the mainstream conversations, what goes mostly unmentioned, especially in mainstream media, are the myriad other results of our current mindsets, patterns of thinking and taken for granted notions about our place in the world and cosmos.

Empirically, as a species we're not yet equipped to meet the challenges brought on by our global domination. By many accounts, the plethora of social and environmental issues we're currently facing are becoming worse — finally frightful enough to get our attention. Many of them have been tugging on our sleeve for at least a couple of centuries, but at long last it's becoming more and more difficult to ignore them. It's not just one or two things tugging at our sleeves anymore. Everywhere you turn, there is another issue, another injustice, another inequality, another loss. There are a lot of sleeve tuggers at this point.

And yet, how could we possibly be equipped to meet these challenges, to stop, bend down and listen to that insistent sleeve tugger asking about micro plastics or forever chemicals? We're raised in an educational and social environment that is intended to give us the specific tools we need to *join in* with the daily mainstream melee. Despite all the rhetoric of critical thinking, our education system is designed from the ground up to help us, in one way or another, become the all-important consumers in a growth-oriented economy, where "success" is measured by our continued and increased capacity to earn, spend and acquire both material goods and paid experiences. Education "reform" is mostly centered around helping us do a more efficient job at producing consumers for the now-global market economy. Over thirty years ago, David Orr went straight to the point.

"The plain fact is that the planet does not need more "successful" people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every shape and form. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these needs have little to do with success as our culture has defined it." - David Orr, *What Is Education For?* (1991) ^[1]

Why A New Dream?

If we wish to educate students to become the problem solvers of our global challenges, we need to rethink our educational systems from the ground up. For the most part, K-21 education in most economically modern societies continues to churn out “citizens” that further the status quo of our industrial growth society, even as more and more of those citizens long in their hearts for something different. Education today isn’t geared towards helping young people become visionary, co-creative contributors to the vast challenges humans are facing in the 21st century. Rather, education is geared towards turning out more cogs in the wheels of the global economic machine. How many beautiful, creative human minds are oriented night and day to either making things that people can buy or trying to convince them they need to buy it. Our creative capital, to use the terms of the system itself, is oriented almost universally toward the generation of money and continuing to grow our economy, the “success” of which is measured, unfortunately, in heavily biased terms.

“In the modern curriculum we have fragmented the world into bits and pieces called disciplines and subdisciplines. As a result, after 12 or 16 or 20 years of education, most students graduate without any broad integrated sense of the unity of things. The consequences for their personhood and for the planet are large. For example, we routinely produce economists who lack the most rudimentary knowledge of ecology. This explains why our national accounting systems do not subtract the costs of biotic impoverishment, soil erosion, poisons in the air or water, and resource depletion from gross national product. We add the price of the sale of a bushel of wheat to GNP while forgetting to subtract the three bushels of topsoil lost in its production. As a result of incomplete education, we’ve fooled ourselves into thinking that we are much richer than we are.” - David Orr, What Is Education For? (1991) ^[1]

If young children aren’t exposed to something different, how can we expect them as adults to contribute in ways that might actually begin to shift our behavior towards that [“more beautiful world our hearts know if possible”](#). Once they exit their formal education and begin their journey in the giant machine of our current economic systems, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to change course. The cycle continues and the problems deepen.

People grow up and raise the next generation of families without ever encountering alternative perspectives or examining our taken-for-granted patterns of thought, beliefs and biases or even the critical day-to-day skills of listening non-judgmentally to others and emotional intelligence. Rather, we encounter daily the stories that normalize war mentality, separation, competition and social inequality, yet never encounter the source of those stories or take the time to imagine alternatives to them. As a result, all of the so-called solutions to the challenges we face are built on the foundation of those same stories of competition, scarcity, growth economies and increased human technology as the savior of mankind and the planet itself. Despite our best efforts at teaching basic mathematics, the world’s dominant education systems continue to pass individuals into adulthood and citizenry without the simple mathematical understanding of linear and exponential growth, the effects of compound interest and debt-based money systems, and the pathological acceptance of infinite, ex-

Why A New Dream?

tractive-based economic growth and consumption within a finite biosphere. Carrying only limited perspectives then, those graduates make unexamined decisions every day, pass their perspectives on to their children and perpetuate and confirm them throughout their communities through their actions.

As it now stands, as young people progress through our systems of education, they are encouraged to differentiate, separate, and specialize in one of the increasing and ever-expanding numbers of academic and work categories. Netflix documentaries and the James Webb telescope notwithstanding, the chances of them running across, much less understanding, the consequences of something like our cosmic origins or indigenous mythopoetic narratives and world views, eventually becomes negligible.^[2] Even less likely are the odds of reflecting on the consequences of those stories or seriously considering the perspectives, wisdom and underlying thought patterns of those stories. As a result, our schools, even the best and brightest, are still churning out students who will fit quite nicely and successfully into the existing model, well-adapted to the mindsets, worldviews and stories that are devastating the bio- and cultural diversity on the planet and, by many accounts, putting our own species at risk.

If people do happen to be exposed to information outside their normal sphere of awareness or understanding, it will likely be through some social media encounter, a documentary or educational film or TV series or brief news bite, offered up mostly for amusement or distraction. Like all media for entertainment, they will be quickly pushed aside or forgotten. Almost certainly, it's not something that will be investigated or contemplated, much less integrated into their current world view and actions. As a result, in our modern society, people grow up and raise families without ever encountering perspectives that might serve to actually transform how our species participates with each other and the rest of the biosphere.

At some point in the cycle, children and adults need to be exposed to a rich variety of perspectives, especially when it comes to the earth and our biosphere out of which we were born and slowly evolved. This includes the plethora of perspectives we share as part of the human species but also all other species, our evolutionary kin and companions here on Earth.

This process of self-discovery, as it were, needs to be accompanied by deep self-reflection and also dialogue with each other about the meaning and consequences of the various viewpoints, ideas and information we're discovering. Included in that reflection and dialogue must be a significant effort and genuine curiosity about the taken for granted beliefs, assumptions, patterns of thought and mindsets that underlie our perspectives and societies.

A Desmond Tutu quote goes something like this: "We've been pulling people out of the river long enough. It's time to go upstream and find out why they're falling in to begin with." I suggest that the structures of the Western education system, which, following the economic system has become global in scope, are facilitating the push of people into the river, rather than providing the help and education that would prevent them from falling in

Why A New Dream?

to begin with. Leadership coursework in K-21 environments, in the rare places it does exist, is focused on becoming more efficient or effective business leaders or teaching and inspiring young people to pull others out of the river (service learning projects). While this altruism and civic engagement is an important undertaking, it's no longer enough. What's now necessary is *transformative* leadership (and *transformative* education in general) aimed at helping people go upstream and preventing others from falling in in the first place. More accurately, we might say it is aimed at helping people extract themselves from the river first and then going upstream to help others.

"Nearly every natural system that governs life on Earth is under severe pressure from our triple-threat of unsustainable resource use, out-of-control production of toxins and unwanted nutrients, and excess population growth. The Ukrainians living under constant random shelling is a pretty good metaphor-of-the-moment for innumerable species who are struggling to weather our behavior. The Anthropocene is as much an existential threat to life as it is an amazingly brief [flash] geologic time period. Climate change due to our super-volcanic production of greenhouse gases dominates the save-the-Earth conversation, but really it is only one aspect of the larger threat we pose to all of life in its current astonishing array."
- Jason Anthony, Field Guide to the Anthropocene, (On the Wing - 8/4/22)^[3]

Admittedly, global warming, climate change, ecosystem collapse, species extinctions, along with the [great acceleration](#) of human impacts across so much of the earth have only recently come into human awareness. They are massive new understandings, to which humans and the rest of life on Earth are now required to adapt. Yet for most people they remain abstract, distant and difficult to comprehend or reflect upon. (This is not, by the way, because we don't have the capability or capacity to grasp them.)

Paradoxically, at the same time, environmental and social justice movements are the largest on the planet. In his book *Blessed Unrest*, Paul Hawken describes the environmental and social justice movement as the largest movement on the planet and in human history. Clearly, a lot of people understand there are challenges and wish to help. But even the good intentions and efforts of millions of activists are caught in a system that puts them in competition with one another for on-line followers, subscriptions, donations and fundraising dollars. At the same time, our education system is focused on outdated factory methods that don't prepare students to go upstream and be the next generation of regenerative leaders or participants. Of course, there is no reason why K-21 formal education cannot cultivate critical skills, awareness and mindsets that will prepare them to participate in a fresh new way and begin to envision and adopt a different set of stories about humanity and our role in the planetary fabric of life. There are more and more youth activists than ever before — it's not like youth can't participate.

Yet, in so many cases, by continuing to adopt the unexamined mindsets of our taken-for-granted thought patterns, beliefs and systems, these passionate activists are often just trying to pull people out of the river or rushing to implement creative "solutions" without ever really understanding the nature of the problems. Discouragement and hopelessness

Why A New Dream?

is inevitable when faced with the evidence that for every step forward, there are multiple steps backward. Nonetheless, their efforts are important, critical even, especially when what we're trying to pull out of the river are endangered ecosystems, water cycles, threatened and endangered species, marginalized and threatened cultures, languages, minority groups and so on. We should try to mitigate as much of the damage to intact ecosystems and human wisdom as possible and continue to cultivate environmental and cultural restoration, regeneration, peace and equality.

Completely reimagining and regenerating our education system may take generations. Luckily, many, if not most, of the basic ideas of transformative leadership, transformative education and regenerative education can quite easily be integrated into existing curricula right away. Despite all the predictions, we don't actually know how many generations we'll have to make these kinds of changes before mitigating disruption is all we'll be able to do.

The world is changing before our very eyes whether we like it or not. The diaspora of Western-derived society, now global, is built upon a set of human stories, so unexamined and taken-for-granted that we fail to even recognize them as stories with specific origins and stories that can change. Our prevalent science fiction writers and filmmakers have little problem creating stories centered around themes of apocalypse, post-apocalypse, war and the ultimate quest to finally defeat evil once and for all, yet few artists are making movies or writing books about the end of market capitalism in service to a perpetual-growth-oriented economy. It's as if we don't know how to extend our creative imagination to such a world — we can scarcely imagine the end of these stories — yet we can imagine the end of civilization and endless war in myriad forms and scenarios. How will we change these unsustainable and destructive human stories if we cannot imagine new ones?

"The supply chain is built entirely on fantasies of human entitlement rooted in scientific ignorance: we can burn millions of years of fossil fuels in decades without disrupting life on Earth; we can grow our population by the billions without consequence; and we can run a Ponzi scheme of constant economic growth within a fever dream that tells us that the Earth's supply of resources is endless." - Jason Anthony, Field Guide to the Anthropocene, (Out of Tragedy, A Glimmer 5/19/22) ^[4]

Science and the scientific approach is great, such as it is, but currently it's caught up in the web of political, ideological and economic ends, rather than the impartial investigation into the nature of the universe, a foundation upon which it supposedly rests. So much scientific research is done to help sell something — perhaps create a "new and improved" product — with little or no thought to the consequences of the process or the end product. Science researchers may be influenced and coerced into the topics of their research. Fear of having their funding denied or withdrawn, being outcast or labelled with derogatory terms, they may shy away from researching truly helpful topics. This is true in nearly every discipline, from medicine to education to physics.

Why A New Dream?

“David Ehrenfeld has pointed out that biology departments no longer hire faculty in such areas as systematics, taxonomy, or ornithology. In other words, important knowledge is being lost because of the recent overemphasis on molecular biology and genetic engineering, which are more lucrative, but not more important, areas of inquiry.” - David Orr, What is Education For? - (1991) ^[1]

Even with all the science taking place, as a society, we remain relatively illiterate scientifically and have difficulty integrating even the simplest science (exponential growth in a finite system for example) into our world view and actions. Only those who are indoctrinated into the particular disciplines can read and understand the studies and the vast majority of us must ultimately rely on the media, for better or worse, to summarize, categorize, interpret and interpolate.

“The truth is that many things on which your future health and prosperity depend are in dire jeopardy: climate stability, the resilience and productivity of natural systems, the beauty of the natural world, and biological diversity.

“It is worth noting that this is not the work of ignorant people. It is, rather, largely the result of work by people with BAs, BSs, LLBs, MBAs, and PhDs. Elie Wiesel made a similar point to the Global Forum in Moscow last winter when he said that the designers and perpetrators of the Holocaust were the heirs of Kant and Goethe. In most respects the Germans were the best educated people on Earth, but their education did not serve as an adequate barrier to barbarity. What was wrong with their education? In Wiesel’s words: “It emphasized theories instead of values, concepts rather than human beings, abstraction rather than consciousness, answers instead of questions, ideology and efficiency rather than conscience.” - David Orr, What is Education For? - (1991) ^[1]

This is not intended as a critique of science, per se. Our ignorance and misuse of science is a product of our systems, including our systems of education.

“Most people who rise through the ranks of orthodox higher education experience an almost inevitable process of indoctrination. As with many cultural matters, so much has been presupposed about our way of life over time, people tend to assume the social institutions around them are all there is and ever was. Values become entrenched, identities become locked, and dogma is cultivated. The prevailing intelligentsia is far from exempt from this “normalizing” process and sometimes one needs to exist far outside the box to make a difference.” - Peter Joseph, The New Human Rights Movement. BenBella Books, Inc. (2018) ^[5]

In medicine and the social sciences, for example, research often targets the symptoms of our modern society (mental health issues, for example), rather than the underlying nature of the society itself, which forms the foundation of health and wellness or dis-ease. We easily look outward, but have difficulty looking inward. The taken for granted assumptions, biases and

Why A New Dream?

filters of our society remain unexamined. We fail to engage our important human ability for self-reflection, introspection and non-cognitive knowing and use them to investigate the structures of our global society itself.

“True intelligence is self-awareness—including a sense of just how wrong you likely are most of the time as a result of your biases. As with any educational content, the more controversial the subject matter, the more difficult the communicative challenge. And there isn’t anything more controversial than questioning culture itself. Being the social creatures we are, our very identity is linked to the values and traditions that surround us. This gravitation is largely out of our control. Hence, questioning culture and its norms invariably turns the question to one’s self. This is delicate territory, no doubt.” - Peter Joseph, The New Human Rights Movement. BenBella Books, Inc. (2018) ^[5]

And yet, without that earnest self-reflection and investigation into the assumptions that lie beneath our society’s current norms, we’re destined to continue down our destructive path.

Knowledge, at least the raw data of information, continues to increase rapidly, yet it doesn’t follow that we’re becoming better people as a result or that our wisdom and deep understanding of the world is also increasing. Unfortunately, the two are not correlated like we might assume. We have a growing disparity between the amount of information we have with the depth of our wisdom, compassion and ability to get along with one another. Our information may grow exponentially, but if our wisdom and concern for others doesn’t keep up, we’ll continue to get kids’ shoes with lights in them, “new and improved” toxic chemicals and more efficient weapons to wage our wars. The purpose of our education systems must go beyond the gathering and learning of information and include foundations for the development of wisdom, understanding and peace.

Along with responsibility, they should all be correlated. As information increases, so should the others. Currently, we have knowledge that gives us fossil fuels, but not the wisdom to harness and wield it responsibly or a considered concern for the future. We now know so many things, through our so-called “independent, unbiased” science, but how can we claim to truly know things without understanding of how they affect everything around us? Our systems of education give us information, but lack even remedial pathways to wisdom, understanding, universal kindness and responsibility.

In fact, the structures of western school education distract us from envisioning the kind of humans we need to be to participate in a more beautiful, transformed future. Fundamentally, children and youth must be given the opportunity to investigate and decode the underlying root metaphors and generally hidden nature of the modern, industrial growth society. They must be exposed to alternative stories and narratives and participate in relational learning with all members (human and otherwise) of their local community. They must participate co-creatively with others and begin to reclaim the power of their visions of the future.

As long as K-21 students continue to be educated within the structures and assumptions of

Why A New Dream?

the current paradigm, the full range of their inherent human inner qualities and capabilities won't be valued, privileged, explored or allowed to flourish and those potentials will continue to lie dormant. We'll continue *producing* the same educational *outcomes* — students who struggle to find and act from their authentic self, share their unique gifts and their deepest human values of equality, peace, universal kindness and interconnection with all of life.

Fortunately, most of the ideas of transformative leadership, transformative, contemplative and regenerative education, can quite easily be integrated into existing curricula during our transition to something completely different. There is no reason to wait until the whole system has changed to begin; indeed, placing more emphasis on transformative, reflective and contemplative education is part of the very change we need to facilitate.

Students need to learn to ask deeper questions and explore the different answers to the questions regarding human progress, human consciousness and human purpose. We need to envision new answers to the question, "What are we educating for?" Without profoundly different answers to that question, we will simply get more of the same. However, Appreciative Inquiry teaches us that our questions are fateful, so here are a couple of alternatives:

"If education systems were designed to develop integration, balance, harmony, kindness and cooperation, maturity, wisdom, ecological awareness, responsibility and restraint, equality, the flowering of co-creative, integral human potential, clarity, presence, commitment and relaxation, what might that look like?"

"If we measured our systems of education against the agenda of serving life, love and beauty and the flourishing and diversification of all life on earth, what would it look like?"

This book, in which I share various principles, practicals and dreams, is a exploration of answers to these questions.

[1] [David Orr. What is Education For? \(1991\)](#)

[2] Despite the multiple emergencies in our social and ecological fabric, it seems most people in modern society are still fixated on the distractions of celebrity-ism, conflicts on social media, and other technology oriented entertainments. Even the most popular films and videos that might help people shift their attention and awareness scarcely receive a fraction of the views of mainstream social media and celebrity. For example, the Canadian pop singer Justin Bieber has single YouTube videos with billions of views and nearly a million comments. In just two and a half years, the song Dynamite by South Korean idol group BTS amassed over a 1.6 billion views and over 1.1 million comments. Educational or activist videos or films pale in comparison. The Netflix series *Our Planet* | *One Planet* narrated by Richard Attenborough may be the only such video series to reach into millions of views. Most receive far less attention, struggling to land even 100,000 views.

[3] [Jason Anthony. Field Guide to the Anthropocene. \(On the Wing - 8/4/22\)](#)

[4] [Jason Anthony. Field Guide to the Anthropocene. \(Out of Tragedy, A Glimmer - 5/19/22\)](#)

[5] [Peter Joseph. The New Human Rights Movement. Ben Balla Books, Inc. \(2018\)](#)