Introduction to Three Papers in Integral Education and Integral Drama Based Pedagogy

These three essays are part of the original issue that appeared as Volume 3 (2021): Issue 4 “Integral Education and Integral Drama Based Pedagogy” and will be published in the forthcoming book.

In his contribution, “Integrating Conflict Management Learning into the Curriculum,” Prof. John O'Toole, University of Melbourne, addresses the overlooked area of teaching young people how to deal with conflict. Although, as social communities with people of different ages as well as levels of power and status, schools are full of conflicts. Yet, O'Toole argues that they are often reluctant to acknowledge this reality, and they are even more reluctant to recognize it by teaching conflict management and transformation. He contends that most conflict and bullying management in schools is reactive and top-down; and if it is taught, it is relegated to the realm of extra-curricular.

O'Toole focuses his attention on “Cooling Conflict,” a ten-year action research project in Australia that resulted in an investigation of the role of drama in providing young people with the cognitive tools they need to resolve their own and other people’s conflicts, as well as to be effective in managing bullying for themselves. The program developed a carefully structured drama pedagogy to give its students both knowledge and a vocabulary to understand the origins and structures of conflict, and to provide them with practice in a range of strategies for resolving, managing, and transforming conflict. The program was intended to provide students with autonomy and agency over this knowledge. To this end, peer teaching became an important part of the program through a wide range of educational settings internationally, formal and informal. In extensive detail, O'Toole leads his reader through the development and implementation of an effective program that exemplifies the core values of integrative teaching and learning.
In “Vivescer: An Online Integral Teacher Development Platform – An Integral Education Case Study from Brazil,” Prof. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens draws on his extensive research and publication on the practices and theories of integral education. In his study, he focuses on a national program in Brazil, a country whose interest in integral education dates to 1932 with the publication of its New Education Pioneers’ Manifesto. He participated in a study of a multi-year project in Brazil that is intended to serve 150,000 public school teachers, and his case study was developed to guide the integral development and education of public-school teachers.

In his case study, Esbjörn-Hargens introduces the initiative and presents the unique Integral Education framework that was developed to guide the integral development and ongoing training of public-school teachers. The framework reflects his years of research and work with Ken Wilber in developing and expanding his Integral Theory. Moreover, it incorporates Brazil’s own vision and practice of Integral Education, and it demonstrates the wide range of applications possible in Integral Education. Esbjörn-Hargens’ framework uses four major learning paths (i.e., Body, Emotion, Mind, and Purpose) in four distinct domains (i.e., Experience, Behavior, Systems, Relationships) to generate a matrix of 16 core competencies for developing integral teachers. He maintains that the success of this platform to date will be reviewed as well as an exploration of how this initiative could contribute to unique global expressions of Integral Education.

In the third essay, “Family Tradition Theater,” Liao Xiaoyi, the founder of Beijing Global Village Environmental and Cultural Center, provides a program outside an educational setting that draws on Integral Drama Based Pedagogy. The Family Tradition Theater centers a project around the ancient wisdom of “Life of Harmony”, i.e., delight in way of life and admiration of harmony, and it incorporates the five ideas of Chinese family culture into five relationships to show the obstacles in these relationships and the ways to communicate about them. The five core values of family culture are harmony, filial piety, faith, righteousness, and propriety; and the five relationships that are focused on are spousal relationship, child-parent relationship, parent-child relationship, individual-group relationship, and group-individual relationship. The Theater guides audiences in understanding relationship “viruses” in daily life, i.e., prejudice, complaint, unrealistic comparison, control, and scheming; and it offers ways to remove these “viruses” through the efforts of facing, introspecting, understanding, mastering, practicing, sharing, and growing. Liao’s approach is to help the participants shape five spiritual accomplishments: emotion, responsibility, rules, rationality, and trust; and to construct three
major mindsets: self-reflection, self-realization, and deepening friendship through mutual assistance.

Liao details the program in a production in 2015 in a small theater in Yaozhuang Village, Shandong province, China. She notes that none of the social workers is a theater professional, but each learned much from combining integral drama based pedagogy with social work simply by undergoing a short training course by Prof. Liwen Ma from the Applied Drama and Expressive Arts Education and Research Center of Beijing Normal University.

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