

TRIBUTE TO IVAN ILLICH (1926-2002)

"Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby "schooled" to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is "schooled" to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavour are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question."

- Ivan Illich,
Deschooling Society (1973: 9)

From Bill Ellis

Too many people take *Deschooling Society* as being primarily about schools. It is, like most of Illich's books, more about society. In his view, society is like school and should be deschooled. Schools program students and instill in them a need to be programmed for the rest of their lives.

Society needed deschooling because it was a mime of the school system that it engendered, and that engendered it. In our current society, individuals are expected to work in dull and stultifying jobs for future rewards. This they are trained to do in schools. They go to school so that they can get a job

to work for future rewards. By deschooling, Illich did not mean taking schooling into the home, nor did he mean "free schools" in which a curricula was set by the students. Schooling of any kind that limited a person's capacity and desire to self-learn was detrimental to the living a full life by that person.

All life, according to Illich, should be "convivial." That is it should be lived in joyous collaboration with friends and colleagues. Learning and work alike should be fun and fulfilling. They should be entered into as, and not differentiated from, play and recreation. A society that does not create that kind of convivial learning and living is not living up to, nor fulfilling, the potential of humanity.

In later works, like *Tools for Conviviality* and *Shadow Work*, Illich developed further the theme of what he meant by living the good life. He took "good" in both of its connotations — good as moral, and good as a pleasing. "Vernacular" was the word Illich used to express the good life. The vernacular is the simple, the local, the communal. Every human and every community has its own natural concept of the vernacular. It is wrapped up in being a human. It is what a person can do themselves in the place they are at the time. It is without dependence of external assistance.

The bicycle was the hardware example Illich often used to exemplify the vernacular. The bicycle extends one's own capability and efforts for transportation. It needs no massive outside system beyond that its operator's control. The automobile, on the other hand, is not only a complex apparatus requiring a complex outside system, but it also requires more work and effort than it produces in transportation. If you take into account all the hours you

spend to buy a car, to purchase gas and tires, to pay taxes for the road, to insure and license it, to clean up its pollution, and pay for all of the other costs, your rate of travel is less than that of a bicycle. That doesn't count the hours, the costs, or the frustration spent in traffic jams and accidents.

In *Medical Nemesis*, Illich took the same concept to the medical system, showing that not only did the medical system not cure ills, but in fact created them. In every aspects of our lives, conviviality and the vernacular have been overwhelmed and diminished by what Illich called the "disabling professions." The law professions have increased crime, the professional economists have created scarcity and poverty, the teaching profession has dumbed us down, the farming profession has produced hunger. With this loss of the vernacular has come the loss of the family and the community. The single goal of humans has become to "make it" in a materialistic global economy.

In his most recent essays, Illich has brought his concepts to a fitting climax. An essay "The Cultivation of Conspiracy" (in *The Challenge of Ivan Illich*, a 2002 book edited by Lee Honacki and Carl Mitcham) discusses friendship. The friendship Illich writes of is not just that of being kind and cooperative to your neighbors. It is a deeper 'conspiratio'. "Con - spiratio" is breathing together. But breathing is not merely expelling air. It is about the breath of life — the soul. 'Conspiratio' is the melding of one's inner being with others.... This conspiratio, or welding of souls, (although Illich, a former priest, doesn't use the word soul) is the root of the vernacular and of the convivial.

- Bill Ellis is the coordinator of A Coalition for Self-Learning <www.creatinglearningcommunities.org>

“We can escape from these dehumanizing systems. The way ahead will be found by those who are unwilling to be constrained by the apparently all-determining forces and structures of the industrial age. Our freedom and power are determined by our willingness to accept responsibility for the future.”

- Ivan Illich

Celebration of Awareness, 1969

REMEMBERING IVAN ILLICH...

From Kishore Saint

Ivan Illich, with whom I had the opportunity to work briefly in 1971 at CIDOC, Cuernavaca... Both Illich and Freire, as also Gandhi, have suffered through distorted instrumental interpretations which can be traced to the meta-narratives of the state and capital. This article goes to the source of the critique of schooling, and the system that maintains and extends it into society, but is unable to overwhelm or 'school' the human society/communities/spirit. Indeed, this conversation on the internet and upcoming conference in Udaipur have the potential to make history through co-inspiration, an inner turning of the spirit or 'inquilab', 'navchetana', a new enlightenment, towards a resolve by the participants to move beyond 'schooling' into vernacular/community/nature spaces and cultures and create the possibility of a different future for humankind and the earth...

From Maria Rortiz

Many of my teachers made me, not laugh, but smile when I asked something about Illich, because they always went on talking trying to scare us with the "terrible" and "mean" ideas of Illich. It's incredible how superficial they were.

From Zaid Hassan

Illich entered my life recently, through his ideas and through stories of his life told by his friends. I heard a story told about him, where a friend of his was diagnosed with a serious illness. Illich was lecturing somewhere at the time. He dropped all his work, got on a plane and nursed his friend for many months, until she passed away.

Illich influenced the thinking of Wolfgang Sachs, John Holt, Gustavo Esteva, Madhu Suri Prakash, John Taylor Gatto, and many others. He had some thought provoking ideas about transportation, employment, health care and several other social issues. You can read more about Illich at these websites:

<http://www.cogsci.ed.ac.uk/~ira/illich/>

<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-illic.htm>

<http://philosophy.la.psu.edu/illich/profile.html>

Most of Illich's books are on line and can be read or downloaded. "Deschooling Society" is on: <http://philosophy.la.psu.edu/illich/deschool/intro.html>

I've heard many such stories about Illich and they conclude with 'that's Illich for you.' These stories give his ideas a depth and an honesty that I've rarely experienced with people who think for a living. All too often there is a serious dichotomy between words and actions. Illich bought the two together in a unity rarely seen. Since the news of his death I find myself looking at the sky, the sun and the grass in a slightly different way. In life, his ideas travelled throughout the world, and now his physical essence, through nature's cycles, will travel through the world. A new pilgrimage has begun.

From Pat Farenga

Experiencing Ivan dying as this learning society group is coming together is interesting, and inspiring. Ivan spread many seeds in many places throughout his life, and I'm grateful that some, such as yours, are sprouting!

“Most of you are seeking a new system of thought, a new system of economics, a new system of religious philosophy. Why are you seeking a new system? You say, ‘I am dissatisfied with the old,’ that is, if you are seeking. Now I say, don’t seek a new system, but rather examine the very system in which you are held, and then you will see that no system of any kind will bring about the creative intelligence which is essential for the understanding of truth or God or whatever name you like to give to it. By the following of no system are you going to discover that eternal reality; but you are going to find it only when you, as individuals, begin to understand the very system that you have built up through the centuries, and in that system discover what is true and what is false.”

- J. Krishnamurti

what if the systems today don't fit us?

PRE-CONFERENCE ON-LINE DIALOGUE

As a precursor to the Unfolding Learning Societies conference in Udaipur, we thought to begin the conversations around learning societies on-line. To invoke a very different kind of get-together – one that would embody the spirit and practice of learning societies – we felt it important for each person to take responsibility for creating the working agenda together. A number of people (full list available at the end) contributed to the internet-based dialogue, which consisted of three rounds of questions:

Round 1

We ask that each of you send a short personal note about yourself to the group. In this note, please be sure to share some of the most meaningful learning/unlearning experiences of your life, some of your experiences with living in and trying to build different learning communities, and some of your most pressing questions and interests with which you are currently engaged.

Round 2

- *What reflections do you have on the articles in the three Learning Societies books? What ideas did you find inspiring or relevant for the contexts you live/work/play in? What do you think is missing?*
- *What opportunities do you see in your own life, family, communities, work, etc. to help move us towards learning societies?*
- *What are the challenges you see for unfolding learning societies?*
- *What stories can you share which bring to life the concept and practice of learning societies?*

Round 3

We would like to explore our hopes and expectations for the conference.

- *What would you like to learn? What would you like to share?*
- *What kinds of processes and interactions would you like to see during our days (and nights!) together? What principles / practices / ways of interaction are working (or have worked) in your learning communities, which you would like to bring to Udaipur?*
- *What is this conference not? What would you like to avoid?*
- *What will make this gathering inspiring and magical for you?*

What follows are excerpts of peoples' responses to these various questions, organized under selected themes. A full copy of this pre-conference publication is available from Shikshantar or on-line at www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/preconferencepub.html

WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT 'UNFOLDING LEARNING SOCIETIES'?

Getting to the Roots of Learning Societies

From Kishore Saint

All living is learning and all living societies are learning societies. They cannot be otherwise. We are all born and grow up in learning societies. In this sense learning is a natural, ongoing process co-terminus with living. It happens unconsciously and intentionally, with purpose and without purpose and in a variety of ways and settings. It is personal as well as social. So what do we mean by 'unfolding learning societies'? Are we talking about the unfolding of something that is wrapped up, suppressed or potent like a bud or seed, something waiting to happen? What does this mean in today's context?

From Shah Jahan Baloch

I consider myself a very fortunate learner, because I am engaged with different communities, not only as co-learner in a critical discourse on prevailing development paradigms at IDSP, but in creating alternative community-based actions of community self-empowerment. So I have tremendous opportunities to share with learners concepts and new ideas to create learning societies through enriching the dialogue and participatory actions. Unfolding learning societies requires conceptual clarity and trust in communities. The challenge is 1) to produce more local content in local languages on education and development; 2) to use innovative approaches of communication with different sections of society; and 3) to preserve local wisdom.

Challenging the Logic of Development and Globalization

From Munir Fasheh

The logic embedded in universal thinking naturally leads to the belief that one person/ people/ nation/ country/ religion/ culture can be absolutely better than another (according to some supposedly universal measure!) and, thus, can impose their ideas and ways on the world at large. The belief that one's ideas and ways are universal or the best is not new. What is new (and exclusively characteristic of western civilization) is the successful diffusion/ dissemination, through "universal" tools (softly or coercively), certain beliefs and practices as universal. The most effective tool has been education as it has been conceived and practiced at least during the past 300 years - through a curriculum taught to all students, and through standards, measures, concepts and meanings that are assumed to be universal.

From Claude Alvares

I have worked as an environmentalist for 25 years but have now decided to work in education as well. The problem begins at the school, where we disconnect children from nature and keep them in that state for fifteen to twenty years. We take them out of nature, imprison them in concrete boxes, teach them false associations between printed texts and the real world, and do much worse besides... After that, it becomes difficult to restore a loving relationship with nature. For people like us from a rich civilisation like India, we are also disconnected from our traditions, languages and civilisational ideals.

From Arif Tabassum

Development has nothing to do for the prosperity of humans. When we look back in the history of last five hundred years, we can easily find the roots of today's development there. We know that our continents (Asia, Latin America, Africa) were brutally exploited in the name of "civilizing them". After World War II, strategies of exploitation sharpened the process of alienating people from their indigenous cultures, resources and creativities to convert them in consumers. They used term 'Development' this time, through which they are maintaining their objectives of exploitation on cultural, social and economic level till the day. The exploitation process is continued through the so-called development workers. The vested interests of these development workers are connected with the promotion of this 'development'. Their survival is conditioned with conventional development paradigm, their luxurious life is maintained with it. How can they deny it? It is so painful for them, when someone criticises their direction.

From Zaid Hassan

In this instance, it struck me, that there's no point arguing or trying to prove that development is harmful. Rather the case must be made that the practitioner of the Western paradigm cannot legitimately tell the practitioner of another paradigm how to live (to put it mildly). The case must be made that the issue is one of simple imperialism and of 'the right to self-determination'. Gandhi did this, he appealed to the highest moral values of the British paradigm, using their language, while on the other hand living, experimenting and creating a uniquely Indian paradigm, that of swaraj. If we are to 'unfold learning societies' then we must figure out how to create the freedom to do so without the very damaging interference of the Western paradigm.

"What really struck me was the question – 'What is a human being?' Are we animal, vegetable or mineral? These concepts become the basis for creating a foundation for the development of attitudes supportive to the realisation of human dignity. After reading this book, I realised how profound is this subject of a simple thing as 'human dignity'. Attending to symptoms, addressing salient causes of poverty, prejudice, abuse and every other form of inequality and violence we can bring about change, but attending to root causes is also important, may be we can create meaningful social and economic transformation."

Sugandhi Baliga

“In today’s world, the education system offers itself as a willing servant of globalisation. Its principal obsession appears to be how to link us spiritually instead with the global economy. Hence the concern with the manufacture of voluntary and involuntary serfs that will sacrifice their lives to ensure the global production machine keeps running without a hitch in exchange for consumer trivia. How do we ensure free education in such a society? We cannot, even if we tried. There appears to be a fundamental contradiction between modern education and the achievement of freedom and the effective functioning of learning societies.

Those of us who are resisting globalisation are therefore encouraging revolts against education as well. I am looking forward therefore to meeting great monkey-wrenchers, mischief-mongers and trouble-makers at Udaipur. Because of the vast influence of the education system on humanity over the past century, I have found these now comprise an endangered species.”

Claude Alvares

“My affiliation to IDSP forced me to greatly rethink some of my perceptions. Here I came to know about the dehumanizing role of schooling, media and the perversion of cultural values and traditions. I am also rethinking the biased teachings of religion. Similarly my orientation about culture was limited to the apparent component. I came to know the essence of cultural values for helping the masses in solving their economic, social and political problems. The local participatory approaches of working for the collective community were not so important to me. My exposure about culture as a source of empowerment and learning was not obvious. Similarly, I was not critical enough about cultural pathologies, which are affecting the lives of thousands of human beings.”

Noreen Bano

The Essence of Study

Late one night, Reb Dov Ber (the “Mitler Rebbe” of Chabad) was up studying Torah in his parents’ house in Liadi. Suddenly, there was a knock on his chamber door, and his father, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the first Rebbe of Chabad, walked in. Reb Dov Ber stood in respect.

“My son, what were you studying just now?”

“I was studying the kabbalistic writings of the Arizal, father,” Reb Dov Ber replied.

“Do you find them profound?” Reb Shneur Zalman asked.

“Father, they contain the secrets of the universe.”

“And do they uplift you?”

“When I study them, I feel as if I were standing before the Supernal Assembly.”

His father paused. “My son, several minutes ago, on the floor just below you, a baby fell out of its crib and was crying. I was upstairs, also studying. But when I heard it cry, I ran downstairs to help, for I was sure that you were asleep No matter how profound and uplifting is the study of Torah, one must never become so engaged that he fails to hear the cries of another human being.”

(C) Eliezer Shore, Bas Ayin, www.shemayisrael.com/shavous/chassidic_stories.htm
(shared by Jan Visser)

REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING

What Is Learning?

From Manish Jain

- Meaningful learning takes place in the context of authentic practice.
- Meaningful learning involves linking the hands, heart and mind (working with one's hands is critical).
- Meaningful learning involves dialogue, particularly the ability to listen in different ways.
- Being in close and continuous interaction with nature and its processes/cycles is essential for understanding oneself and the world.

From Raj Sethia

From a culture of teaching and passive information acquisition, we should actively promote a culture of life-long learning which nurtures flexible learning processes of questioning, analysing, feeling, reflecting, owning knowledge, negotiating, doing, self-motivation, patience, communication, collaboration, creativity, self-discipline, tackling stress, dealing with conflict and self-confidence...

From Ashraf Patel

To me, learning is about breaking boundaries and creating personal and social spaces for exchange. Learning to me is an adventure - which everyone must have a right to go on. Learning is about change - it cannot be passive. Learning to me is value loaded - it must bring about peace.

From Jason Fernandes

Learning as a process of looking beyond what is presented to ... us by the System. Looking beyond to what exists, to the possibilities of

what could. To broadening my experience base, and moving out of ruts that I may have been. Ruts of class, of cultures I have grown up with, of urban settings etc.

From Rustam Vania

Life is an emotional response. So is learning. Primarily. For that, I guess I need to follow my heart. So why does school concentrate on my head? The easy task is to learn, the more difficult task is to unlearn! It's the latter that I find intriguing and challenging.

From Anita Borkar

One and a half decades of working with various groups, including children, parents, teachers, farmers and women in the villages, on initiatives to understand and facilitate human communication, I have been enriched by their wisdom and ways of learning. Growing with my ten-year young daughter Sakhi has taught me in abundance about nuances of life and living and a constant reminder that learning is indeed a continuous and joyful process, more so in an environment of trust and mutual respect.

From Ravi Gulati

I think one of my most meaningful unlearning and learning (and aren't the two always together! to use a Hindu analogy, Siva, the destroyer, is worshipped in the form of the *linga*, a symbol of creation) has been the realization that there's no escaping 'doing' in order to move on the path of 'understanding'. At the risk of making mistakes, even terrible ones sometimes, we can never wait for a total understanding to dawn first, before we begin to play our role in this mysterious world in which we find ourselves.

“One day somebody asked me a question, ‘Can you share an experience from which you learnt something?’ This was a difficult yet exciting question for me. When I reflected on it I realised that learning was very natural and spontaneous process for me. All the experiences were learning experiences for me. But that question made me very conscious and my learning process also became very conscious. This criticality and reflection helped me discover myself, my relationships with my world and became part of my work while dealing with MEDIA in Abhivyakti.”

Sujata Babar

“Some of the things I have unlearnt during this time: that the only way to be prepared for the future is to plan out exactly what you’re going to do well in advance; that my education would be completed in university and professional training courses in the years immediately after; that there is one objective truth in all cases, which, with enough research and enquiry, would become apparent to any person who thought logically.”

Alok Singh



Image by Ravi Gulati

Where Is Learning? When Do We Learn?

From Sugandhi Baliga

Let me share one of my experiences when I played a game: Each of us were given certain tasks to perform in the whole group. I received the task of grabbing notes from others. As soon as the time began, I was so unconsciously following the instructions that I did not know why was I following the instruction without even questioning what is the purpose of this game. . . . While grabbing, I also realised I was getting violent if there was resistance from the other side. Violence is so deep rooted in me, that it does not seem to be coming across very consciously but while engaging with the community with a specific goal, my values were emerging so clearly. I was stunned at myself for that kind of behaviour in the group.

From Susanne Schnuttgen

We are trying to share our learning/un-learning experiences, but I realized that my most important ones are very intimate and personal, almost sacred. . . . They unfolded in my relations with people I love and care about, with situations and challenges that I never expected to be confronted with. They involved situations where logic does not take you very far, where you need to trust that things will move on and eventually for the better. Stories about human learning are stories about hope, love and creativity. They are part of our process of losing our innocence and discovering new dimensions of life and our relations to the people and the world around us.

From Yusef Progler

Unlearning. . . I am still trying to figure out how I learned all that stuff that needs to be unlearned! That has to be part of our work, too, I think, identifying those pervasive sorts of daily life lessons that are reinforced in myriad ways by family, friends, society, media. But my earliest unlearning experiences were visceral and emotional, not intellectual. I was alienated from school and church at a very early age, they just didn't feel like places I wanted to be. Various incidents of personal violence targeting my perceived identity, real or imagined, sensitized me to racial hatred. Misguided teaching reforms in grade school turned me away from reading, and so I spent a lot of time in non-literary endeavors, like art and music.

From Arif Tabassum

Loralai is culturally a very rich area, its folk literature, local cultural values etc. are full of energy that generates collectivism, mutual accountability, learning and interdependency. The learning processes in these communities were rooted in their culture and agriculture. These two factors of their life were providing opportunities of mutual learning and interdependency to them. We can say these communities were learning communities, the spaces of agricultural farms, mosque, baitak, nasta, mailmastia, indigenous sports and day to day interactions among them were learning spaces. In these spaces each and every community member participates and learns from other's experiences. These spaces were rich sources of knowledge sharing and skills learning. . .

“When I was a political activist my perception was that the culture and religion are the core obstacle of progress and we have to overcome this by throwing out it, for the development the society should adopt modern principals then it will be developed. But when I learned that how the culture could be a source of collective reflection, learning and reconnecting the society to nature. How the world religions can contribute to bring back the humanity to its origin and soul. Now my efforts are to interact with communities in a learning discourse on the concepts of development, change and culture.”

Shah Jahan Baloch

The Parrot's Training

Once upon a time there was a bird. It was ignorant. It sang all right, but never recited scriptures. It hopped pretty frequently, but lacked manners. Said the Raja to himself: 'Ignorance is costly in the long run. For fools consume as much food as their betters, and yet give nothing in return.'

He called his nephews to his presence and told them that the bird must have a sound schooling. The pundits were summoned, and at once went to the root of the matter. They decided that the ignorance of birds was due to their natural habit of living in poor nests. Therefore, according to the pundits, the first thing necessary for this bird's education was a suitable cage. The pundits had their rewards and went home happy.

A golden cage was built with gorgeous decorations. Crowds came to see it from all parts of the world. 'Culture, captured and caged!' exclaimed some, in a rapture of ecstasy, and burst into tears. Others remarked: 'Even if culture be missed, the cage will remain, to the end, a substantial fact. How fortunate for the bird!' The goldsmith filled his bag with money and lost no tune in sailing homewards.

The pundit sat down to educate the bird. With proper deliberation he took his pinch of snug: as he said: 'Textbooks can never be too many for our purpose!' The nephews brought together an enormous crowd of scribes. They copied from books, and copied from copies, till the manuscripts were piled up to an unreachable height. Men murmured in amazement. 'Oh, the tower of culture, egregiously high! The end of it lost in the clouds!' The scribes, with light hearts, hurried home, their pockets heavily laden.

The nephews were furiously busy keeping the cage in proper trim. As their constant scrubbing and polishing went on, the people said with satisfaction: 'This is progress indeed!' Men were employed in large numbers and supervisors were still more numerous. These, with their cousins of all different degrees of distance, built a palace for themselves and lived there happily ever after.

Whatever may be its other deficiencies, the world is never in want of fault-finders; and they went about saying that every creature remotely connected with the cage flourished beyond words, excepting only the bird. When this remark reached the Raja's ears, he

summoned his nephews before him and said: 'My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?' The nephews said in answer: 'Sire, let the testimony of the goldsmiths and the pundits, the scribes and the supervisors be taken, if the truth is to be known. Food is scarce with the fault-finders, and that is why their tongues have gained in sharpness.' The explanation was so luminously satisfactory that the Raja decorated each one of his nephews with his own rare jewels.

The Raja at length, being desirous of seeing with his own eyes how his Education Department busied itself with the little bird, made his appearance one day at the great Hall of Learning. From the gate rose the sounds of conch-shells and gongs, horns, bugles and trumpets, cymbals, drums and kettledrums, tomtoms, tambourines, flutes, fifes, barrel-organs and bagpipes. The pundits began chanting mantras with their topmost voices, while the goldsmiths, scribes, supervisors, and their numberless cousins of all different degrees of distance, loudly raised a round of cheers.

The nephews smiled and said: 'Sire, what do you think of it all?' The Raja said: 'It does seem so fearfully like a sound principle of Education!' Mightily pleased, the Raja was about to

remount his elephant, when the fault-finder, from behind some bush, cried out: 'Maharaja, have you seen the bird?'

'Indeed, I have not!' exclaimed the Raja. 'I completely forgot about the bird.' Turning back, he asked the pundits about the method they followed in instructing the bird. It was shown to him. He was immensely impressed. The method was so stupendous that the bird looked ridiculously unimportant in comparison. The Raja was satisfied that there was no flaw in the arrangements. As for any complaint from the bird itself, that simply could not be expected. Its throat was so completely choked with the leaves from the books that it could neither whistle nor whisper. It sent a thrill through one's body to watch the process.

This time, while remounting his elephant, the Raja ordered his State ear-puller to give a thorough good pull at both the ears of the fault-finder. The bird thus crawled on, duly and properly, to the safest verge of inanity. In fact, its progress was satisfactory in the extreme. Nevertheless, Nature occasionally triumphed over training, and when the morning light peeped into the bird's cage it sometimes fluttered

its wings in a reprehensible manner. And, though it is hard to believe, it pitifully pecked at its bars with its feeble beak.

'What impertinence!' growled the kotwal. The blacksmith, with his forge and hammer, took his place in the Raja's Department of Education. Oh, what resounding blows! The iron chain was soon completed, and the bird's wings were clipped. The Raja's brothers-in-law looked black, and shook their heads, saying: 'These birds not only lack good sense, but also gratitude!' With text-book in one hand and baton in the other, the pundits gave the poor bird what may fitly be called lessons! The kotwal was honoured with a title for his watchfulness, and the blacksmith for his skill in forging chains.

The bird died.

Nobody had the least notion how long ago this had happened. The fault-finder was the first man to spread the rumour. The Raja called his nephews and asked them, 'My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?' The nephews said: 'Sire, the bird's education has been completed.'

'Does it hop?' the Raja enquired.

'Never!' said the nephews.

'Does it fly?'

'No.'

'Bring me the bird,' said the Raja.

The bird was brought to him, guarded by the kotwal and the sepoys and the sowars. The Raja poked its body with his finger. Only its inner stuffing of book-leaves rustled.

Outside the window, the murmur of the spring breeze amongst the newly budded asoka leaves made the April morning wistful.

- Rabindranath Tagore
(shared by Shilpa Jain)

REFLECTIONS ON THE CULTURE OF SCHOOLING

From Norman Longworth

Where, I ask myself, did the pure joy I experience when listening to and understanding great music come from? In my culture that would be Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart and countless other composers whose contribution to human happiness is beyond price. Where, equally, does the facility to understand and enjoy a Shakespeare play, or appreciate the beauty of language used by Wordsworth, Byron and a thousand other poets come from? Where does my great love of history, geography, art, travel, science and literature originate?

I think that it comes from great teachers who did not impose their thoughts upon me but who opened the doors of perception and allowed me to walk inside and experience the treasure within. Those teachers were in the schools I went to... 'teaching' for me is not the imposition of another's ideas or knowledge, but the expert opening up of the mind and the intellect to allow it to take in the understanding, beauty and wisdom of our passage on this earth. Perhaps the problem is not the school, but the stifling system which puts teachers into the position of information brokers within artificially fragmented subject areas.

From Arif Tabassum

In our communities we have thousands of examples of personalities and as well as of communities which are never even entered in the school but they know history, geography, literature, astronomy and many other natural and social sciences very well than many schooled and 'educated' people. Do you think that the sense of competition, fear of grading, burden of homework, tension of exams, keeping children in fear of punishment and greed of rewards that take place in schools, can produce great thinkers, practitioners and challenging personalities in our societies?

From Jan Visser

Perhaps the most serious problem with schooling as we know it is the monopolistic hold that the idea of schooling has acquired, over time, on people's thinking about learning, resulting in the generic perception that 'learning is what you do in school,' thus implying that learning is the result of instruction and nothing else. Deschooling, in my view, is not doing away with the school. It's doing away with a suffocating mindset about the school and then reconsidering how human learning

“Had I the opportunity to be with you, I would have loved to share the experience of my son who is schooling in France in a bilingual and quite an elitist school. He left school to travel with us to India at the age of 8. For a year he home schooled and travelled extensively with his father while I was busy trying to get Liberate School going. On our return from India, he had to get back to school which is compulsory in France and besides he was very eagerly looking forward to it.

The dilemma the kid (and parents!!!) went through the following year is a long and interesting story. He is not sure he likes school but does not admit he dislikes it. He questions what the teachers had to say. He wants to be there but not really! He does prefer having a teacher explaining things to him and did not really like his father changing roles to become his teacher at the same time, but finally he prefers his father explaining a few things to him and so on... one issue seems interesting to explore would be the children’s experiences about schooling and life with real life stories of children.”

Sheela Pimpare

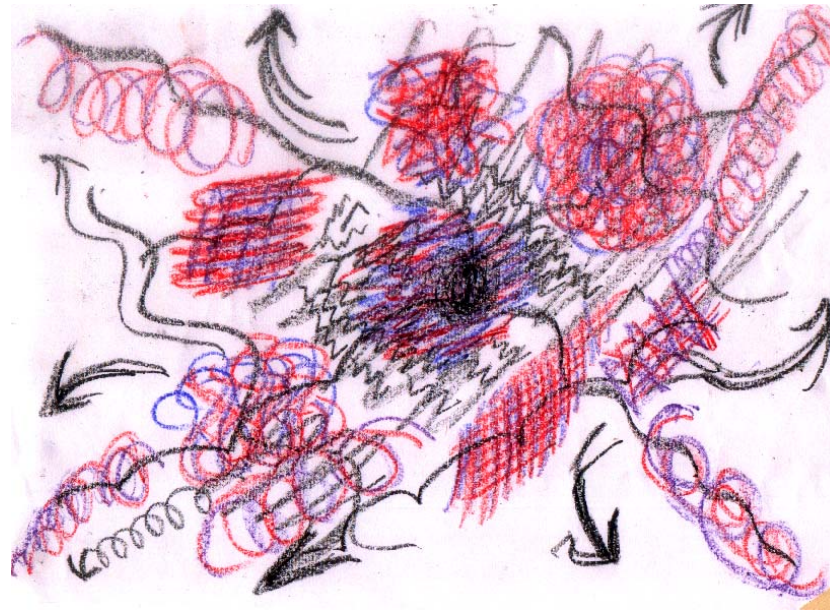
can best be facilitated in whatever settings (including some that we may continue to call school), by whatever means, for multiple purposes, and driven by the concern to explore learning in its fullest richness.

**From
Sudhir Pattnaik**

Since most of us have come out of the same or similar systems of education of which we have become critical now and therefore, are seeking alternatives, there is a need to learn from the originals who have never taken part in any so called systems of education. We need to reflect also on how these people are defining ‘learning’, ‘schooling’ and ‘education’. For the last 12-13 years I have been frequently visiting areas where these originals live in and I have felt how wisdom lives there eternally... the real teachers in my life have been the ‘unschooled’ ones who have never come anywhere nearer to the so called systems of education.

From KB Jinan

In the present technological culture, the notion of knowledge has shifted the center of knowledge from Nature to human, from collective to ego, from heart to intellect/mind, from



intuition to reason, from experience to information, from holistic to compartmental. The effects of the modern education on the individual are compartmentalization, alienation, boredom, intellectualization, conceptualization, etc. The larger and more dangerous effects of modern education on the planet are that we

have destroyed its ecosystems, finished non-renewable wealth, made extinct many animals, plants, etc. . . .

The worst pollution is the pollution of words and concepts and books. Knowledge evolved out of experience is meaningful and is within the context of living. But the concepts created from abstraction are endless and most often meaningless. Deeper and authentic experience can evolve deeper knowledge. Anthro-centered or euro-centered knowledge cannot become holistic. Only by accessing the nature’s knowledge, which is accessed by all life forms, can there be holistic knowing. The only way to access this knowledge is to de-intellectualize and listen deeply and honestly to our inner being. Holistic knowledge is not a matter of more information, sensitive or otherwise. What is required is a qualitative change from within.

Deschooling Society Revisited

Thirty years ago, Ivan Illich, in Deschooling Society (Marion Boyars: London, 1971) argued for the 'disestablishment of schools'. Deschooling was not about (naively) closing down schools, but was a metaphor for de-institutionalizing our lives. Illich tried to warn us about the cataclysmic man-made miseries that are emerging as by-products of industrialized society and dominant notions of Development and Progress.

Driving this process are 'manipulative social institutions' such as hospitals, schools, etc.

Illich called these institutions 'false public utilities' because they aggravate the very problems (physical pollution, social polarization and psychological impotence) that they claim to do away with. What makes these institutions dangerous is that they replace our autonomous modes of living (based on self-reliance and interdependence) with heteronomous modes (that rob us of our confidence to 'do' without professional care or external certification). As a result, "rich and poor alike...view doctoring oneself as irresponsible, learning on one's own as unreliable, and community organization as a form of aggression or subversion."

Illich focused on exploding the myth of schooling, because "the stakes of society are much higher if a significant minority loses its faith in schooling... This would endanger the survival of the economic order built on the co-production of goods and demands, (and) the political order built on the nation-state into which students are delivered by the school." Schooling is particularly insidious, because it claims to promote independent, critical judgment while relying upon a pre-determined, pre-packaged process.

- "Resisting Schooling"
Vimukt Shiksha Issue 8
June 2000

From Coumba Toure

When there was no school, did people learn? What did they learn? How did they learn it? If we close down all the schools and universities today will people continue to learn? ... Today if there are many places in the world where there is no school - I know particularly in many villages in West Africa. I know there is a strong movement of educators working to fix that problem. But I am working and trying to find out what are the alternatives we could create and start implementing before schools get to those places, because I see the lack of schools as a big opportunity for alternatives in education.

From Vivek Bhandari

Schooling, to me, is one part of the larger network of institutions that play a role in shaping us as "modern subjects"—as people who have internalized the attributes and attitudes one expects in "rational," "democratic," "individuals." It seems, to me at least, that each one these three concepts is defined in a particularly narrow way, in a way that is largely oblivious to the complexity that dynamism that shapes our social

world. In other words, I suspect that the issues that most of us are articulating in our critique of education require a deeper engagement with the "school's" location within the larger matrix of institutions (the state, corporations, educational establishments...) that structure it.

From Lisa Aubrey

To fall into the dichotomy of "formal school or not" or "school or de-school" is to buy into the simplistic paradigmatic mode of thought of global mainstream governing ideologies—developed vs underdeveloped, Global North vs Global South, democracy vs dictatorship, civilized vs uncivilized, etc. This dichotomy is simply too rigid, and at a rudimentary level, artificial. The "schooling" problems and alternatives are more multi-dimensional, layered, complex, circuituous than this simple dichotomy suggests. For me, it is only because I have both a textured, loving, knowledgeable (in many ways traditional) bayou Creole culture AND formal schooling that I am who I am. I could not have gotten one from the other.

In one of the Upanishads comes the story of a boy going to his guru and asking him: "Will you please teach me what is the nature of Reality? Will you teach me please what is the essence of Life, the meaning of Life, all the knowledge in your books?" The guru says: "I would love to help you, but look I am very old and I have these 200 cows. I need your help. They used to live in the forest. Would you take them away from the place that I am living, enter the deep forest, find a place where you will feel comfortable and live there till the 200 cows become 1000. While they are becoming 1000, you have to observe, interact with, and listen to everything that happens around you. Come back with the 1000 cows, then we shall see about your learning."

And the Upanishads proceeds to disclose how the young boy with 200 weak and lean cows goes far off into the forest having trusted the words of the sage. He lived there, nurturing the cows and being nurtured by them. For the process to be successful, he had to explore, dialogue and be with Nature. Over time, he started to understand the movement of the sun, the moon, the stars, the rivers, the trees, the birds, the living and growing patterns of the cows, the intelligence that they express. For him learning, working, playing and being/becoming became one.

And the Upanishad proceeds to tell us that when the young man went back to the guru's place with 1000 cows, his entire being radiated with the light of deep understanding. He was joyful, his face glowing, his eyes full of an inner peace and bliss. And the guru said: "Congratulations, you have learnt by yourself."

(shared by Manish Jain)

REDEFINING GURU

Who are the inspirations in our lives?

From Zaid Hassan

Typical teacher-student relationships are characterised by a power imbalance, that is, one has the knowledge, the other doesn't and requires the help of the teacher to acquire it. It isn't as if these relationships must necessarily involve a power imbalance, but rather we have accepted this imbalance for too long... how to build learning relationships that are not characterised by the power imbalance that almost always characterises learning from an 'expert' and that makes me wonder why we are so quick to give away this label of 'expert' to so many.

From Maria Rortiz

My father is a very good "learning company" to me. From time to time we meet and we talk about the last things I learned, we discuss and reflect about them, we try to see in what point of my process I am, sometimes he tells me where can I find out more about something, who I could talk to. Then we say good bye and it is like after that I know what I want to read, what I want to explore more... if we see what one of the best "contributors" of my learning process does, is listen.

From Vachel Miller

The big teacher in my life weighs about 10 kg and speaks his own indigenous language. His name is Galen, and he's our 8-month old son. My wife Sarah and I are sharing the adventure of parenthood. It's an amazing learning adventure, one that is challenging and changing my identity. We make up songs and look into each other's eyes. He likes to grab my glasses, pull them off my face, and chew on them. A message, perhaps, that it's less important to be reading books than being in direct contact with him, with the spontaneous and playful energy of life.

From Zainab Bawa

I have come to realize that experience is the best teacher and that we can internalize some of life's most critical lessons when we have direct experiences. Also, if we have to effect changes in the system, sometimes, it is important to be in the system and see how your contemporaries and colleagues

are receiving it. I have also come to realize that even within the system, there are teachers who are understanding the importance of questioning and critical examination which they try to promote through their teaching methods.

From Anil Gupta

We walk every six months through the villages in hot summer and cold winter, for 8-10 days as a part of shodh yatra (and next one is in Madurai from Dec 22 till 30, 2002) to learn, recalibrate our understanding and honour knowledge experts and green grassroots innovators at their door step. During one such yatra in Kutch, we met a shepherd who had about 500 sheep. I asked him a curiosity (which I thought was a smart one), "Will you be able to identify your sheep, if it got mixed with the herd of another shepherd??" He saw a paper in my hand. It was actually the route plan of shodh yatra. He asked me to give him that paper. I gave him that, not knowing what was in store for me. He looked at that paper and said, "To me, all the letters on this page look alike," and then laughed and started walking away.

From Saima Gul

I learned a lot from illiterate women, and my experience of working with them always give me strength. The current shift of modernization is changing the values and family dynamics, but the women of interior areas are the caretakers of these values, managers of their house, working in the field of agriculture, providing treatment through indigenous herbs. But they are considered "illiterate" and seen as a burden on society.

From Nitin Paranjape

In one of our learning fairs organised for community children of eight villages in the self-directed learning project, many interactive stalls have been organised by the children. The idea is to share their ideas, dialogue and learn. Children put up different stalls which is rich in experiments, games and media. I enjoy the day, as do the children who have come to the fair in large numbers. In the team sharing the general consensus is that the fair was a success. I ask myself what did I learn since the aim was to promote learning. Did I let my curiosity drive me towards learning how some of the tricks, experiments were put together by the children. Did I dialogue with the children and explore the process? I realised that my "good time" was actually a consumption of all that was on display in the stalls. I did not engage with any children, had a meaningful dialogue and let my relationship develop with any of them. I realised that I had lost an opportunity to learn from the children.

From Ram Subramaniam

[I learned about] leadership from a rural dairy farm built and managed by a traditional community for over four decades near Madurai. 'Our chief-man's decision is final and we abide by whatever he decides,' said the group in their small alcove of a temple. They were in a meeting deciding some crucial issues for the community. Their village chief smiled and walked out for a tea. In his absence, most of the decisions were made, pronounced, instructions given for execution and people started dispersing! When there were a few left, he ambled back, 'Hey, but, how did you

"... On the other side we can say that Nuclear Bomb is the product of schooled minds. Corruption, nation states, arms race etc. are the products of schooled minds. Do you think that the sense of competition, fear of grading, burden of homework, tension of exams, keeping children in fear of punishment and greed of rewards that take place in schools, can produce great thinkers, practitioners and challenging personalities in our societies? Can you please imagine for few moments what is happening in the world? Who are involved in social injustices? Who created World Bank and IMF to suck the blood of poor through out the world? Who are behind the huge MNCs and what is their role? Who invented and are still producing nuclear and hydrogen bombs? You know what happened with the common people of Afghanistan and who did it? You don't think behind all this situation are the 'educated' people who have studied in the best schools of the world?"

- Arif Tabassum

“Day before yesterday my eight-year-old daughter was watching a comedy show on TV. One of the characters said, “Dad has just had the second and final heart attack.” Immediately she became rather curious and as usual bombarded us with a series of questions: What is heart attack? Why is second heart attack final? How many heart attacks can we get?”

Just as I struggled to answer her, came a fresh set of queries: Can we have heart attack while we are sleeping? Can we die while we are sleeping? I was really amazed by her ability to raise fresh questions and was almost envious of her ability to be fascinated by the most mundane incident/object/happening and remain ever curious. AND THEN CAME A REMARK THAT HIT ME LIKE A BOLT FROM THE BLUE. She said to herself: ‘It is so lucky to have heart attack and die in sleep. Then you don’t have to get up next day and go to school.’”

Raj Sethia

“Today whatever I am good at, I don’t feel like to give its credit to my schools. Theatre, trekking, mountaineering, badminton, writing, photography, folk dance etc etc, my schools were never interested in these things or they could not show me the way I needed.”

Subhash Rawat

decide for him?’ ‘That is not a problem,’ says the chief. ‘We all think alike and know what is good for the community, how can we differ in our decisions?’! These are economically poor people, who built their management systems with their wisdom.

From KB Jinan

Apart from issues of culture, creativity, employment, which of course are very important, I think for the so-called educated, the traditional craftspeople act as a mirror to see our own predicament. But we don’t look, we don’t see. Because our colonized mindsets are still looking at the west mesmerized and dazed. We don’t see the writing on the wall. We cannot continue this life style by looting and plundering the mother earth. So the real function of these so called uneducated people is in helping us to find a way out of this situation. This can only happen if we go to them as learners with humility.

From Sudhir Pattnaik

I started my ‘education’ in the city of Cuttack and put an end to it in the city of New Delhi. I have come across persons - some of them may have extraordinary in their ‘teaching’ - but I was always in search of a Teacher - a teacher who could help me in getting answers to my questions, who could help me to learn things that interest me and also who could stand by me, whenever I refused to learn something imposed on me or dictated to me. I never got such a teacher. At the end of my so-called education, I realised that I have seen only tutors in my life but not teachers. My real education started after I finished my ‘education’. Let me tell you very honestly that the real teachers in my life have been the ‘unschooled’ ones who have never come anywhere nearer to the so called systems of education.



Growing up in an urban middle class environs, all through my formal schooling years, I was regarded as an ardent student – ‘obedient’, ‘disciplined’ and ‘well-mannered’. Through all the praises and laurels, I always harboured a feeling of discomfort within, for everytime I wanted to say my own thoughts and go my own way, I was often discouraged and at times even rebuked for doing so. Much later in life, I realised that these very adjectives worked as a trap which left no scope for exploration and experimentation.

Anita Borkar



“Since I belong to this region called Mewar (but was living away getting ‘educated’ in bigger cities like Jaipur and Delhi) I have also been trying to become a bit more fluent in the local boli (language) Mewari, so that I can more deeply appreciate the local reeti riwaz and parampara (vibrant traditions and lifestyle). I also realize that there is a very humbling feeling in knowing your local language, as it sometimes liberates you from the arrogance of knowing one single overpowering universally spoken language. It gives you a different kind of energy and allows you to look at life in many new ways. I have therefore been working with my friends on uncovering and unleashing the vast hidden possibilities and wisdom in Mewari that we truly need to counter Development.”

Vidhi Jain

MULTIPLE MODES OF EXPRESSION

Why are expressions important for learning societies? What are the challenges to them today?

From Marianne Knuth

There is an enormous part of Unfolding Learning Societies that has to do with helping people return to themselves – whatever that means. To simply be allowed to explore who I am, what I bring to the world, and appreciating that (some of the students could not believe that the ability to listen to others could be something that could be called a gift, or the ability to dance and make music!). And then to link that to what my community actually is (including the natural habitat we find ourselves in), and what we bring to the world. This seems to be so key to helping people then open up to hope, and courage and creativity.

From Manish Jain

Interacting with young people in Udaipur over the last several years, I have been seriously concerned by the weakness of school-going children and “educated” youth/parents to engage in symbolic forms of thinking – to interpret the world in different ways, to dig into the layers and layers of meaning behind stories/art/songs/proverbs/etc, to create our own meanings, to see things from multiple perspectives. This resulted in a serious loss of sensitivity, patience and imagination. I think that this black-and-white, linear, literal, superficial, etc. mind is a major challenge for unfolding learning societies.

From Vachel Miller

I’m also fascinated by the integration of spirituality in education... Unfortunately, this wellspring of human wisdom has been totally cut out of the discourse on education. I’m looking forward to a lifelong effort to bring back poetry and theater and wisdom literature and other forms of human expression into the educational conversation, to balance the dependence on the dry and distant forms of knowledge that have all too often dried up the educational imagination.

From Shilpa Jain

What I appreciated in all the stories told so far (both in the books and now on-line) is the sheer range of ways by which people see learning societies emerging in their very different contexts: dialogues, storytelling, theater, open space technology, appreciative inquiry, music, art, farming, personal expression, collective work, etc. This diversity I find inspiring for so many reasons. One because it stands in contrast to the very institutionalized ‘reform’ efforts — charity, schooling, literacy, advocacy, campaigns, petitions, marches, etc. Two because there is an appreciation for the unknown, for surprise, as to what will come out of them. Similarly, there is an urge to create and connect in these processes. They are not about control or engineering everyone to fit into some ideal Utopia (the unified nation, a 100% literate populace, etc.)

Examples of Expressions

From Jan Visser

Making music together with others, particularly at the level of a small ensemble like a quartet or a trio, I found to be an equally fascinating experience of learning together. As it

concerns music, it involves dimensions of the existence that cannot be expressed by means other than music... what I am saying here may only make sense for those who have been able to engage in similar experience, like being part of a dance company, an art community, group of theater players.

From Munir Fasheh

For the past five years, I have been going through a fascinating learning/unlearning experience through my involvement with *qalb el-umour*, a magazine that embodies an approach, values and convictions different from what we are conditioned to. All the “ingredients” that are needed to produce the magazine are available to any group anywhere: living, doing, experiencing, reflecting, expressing, conversing, sharing, and friendship... Any one, together with a group of friends, can start working on producing an issue where they live. There are no copyrights and no editors-in-chief. There are no sections in the magazine; each contribution is a “whole” in itself, reflecting a part or an aspect of the life of the contributor. No voice is suppressed and no experience is ignored. There is no “right experience” and “wrong experience,” and no meaning for success and failure. Every experience is an opportunity for learning... The “project” embodies a vision that springs from deepening our understanding of our own human experience, and from our attempts to make sense of it.

From Arif Tabassum

Krastah: - Krastah was (somehow ‘is’) another participatory and collective learning approach, which was a woman-led collective activity. After the collection of wool from sheep, the whole women of the community would be invited to the

home of that family and they would collectively start a process to make carpet from the wool. During this process, the life situation, social matters, and the problems and hurdles of the routine work were shared by women, which on one hand, created the learning opportunity from each other’s experience, and on the other hand, kept them well informed about social events. Carpet making skill is also learned in this activity. This gathering also provides the creation/recreation opportunity through folk songs, which was contributing to keep alive the local folk literature.

From Linda Mbonambi

Every local dialogue during the planning process began with prayer, local artists performances, and was deliberately structured to ensure that participants were comfortable and at ease and able to express views. I recall that in one of the sessions, hundreds of people had come to debate and agree on the city budget. Community workers invoked the presence of the Divine at the meeting venue before deliberations, which resulted in people taking charge of the gathering — to the extent that what seemed to be a formal budget gathering broke into a song, ululation and dance, prior to the discussion on the city budget allocation...

“The creation of learning societies is part of the educational responses to the deepening crisis in our education systems. This crisis is a crisis of rigidity of objectives, contents, processes and systems of education; a crisis of both the internal and external inefficiency of state-controlled education systems.

The responses to the crisis should include the creative use of diversity to achieve unity of quality learning outcomes. As learners needs are diverse, so are the contexts and environments in which learning takes place. Creating enduring learning societies is an exercise in creating enabling and empowering conditions and environments for the exercise of the right and freedom to learn. Freedom to learn is freedom to question, to analyze, to imagine and to create. Udaipur must contribute to ensuring freedom to learn irrespective of time and place. Is this not the essence of learning societies?”

Ekundayo Thompson

The Fifth Monk

Once upon a time there were four teenage monks who, seeking enlightenment, sat by a riverbank in meditation and prayer. Years passed in quiet contemplation. One day a basket floated down the river with a crying baby inside. The monks waded into the river and rescued the baby. Soon more baskets with babies appeared, and the monks were frantic with action. Suddenly, three monks walked away, leaving a single monk to her rescue efforts.

Months later, the flow of babies stopped and the second monk returned. He explained that he had walked upstream to a village where, due to overpopulation and famine, the babies were being released downstream. There he raised the sufficient funds and established an orphanage to care for the babies. The problem was solved, and the two monks returned to meditation.

But soon thereafter the orphanage became overcrowded and the crisis recommenced. Years later the problem mysteriously stopped, and the third monk returned. She explained that, in an effort to get at the cause of the overpopulation problem, she had established a planned parenthood program. The problem was solved, and the three monks returned to meditation.

Unfortunately, years later, a downturn in the economy and a conservative trend in government funding resulted in termination of the program, and the crisis returned. Many years later, after much tumult and upset, and little meditation on the part of the monks, the problem once again mysteriously stopped, and the fourth monk returned. He explained that overpopulation was just one of a complex set of issues requiring

attention. He had worked to bring together those activists involved in all these issues into a single, social and political movement for progressive change. After years of effort, the movement successfully brought together and elected into office a powerful and effective liberal coalition. The problem was solved, and the four monks returned to meditation.

Tragically, four years later, the liberal coalition ran amuck of party politics and was voted from office by a conservative coalition. The baby crisis returned, and it seemed worse than ever. Or maybe it was just that the monks were now much older and weary from their years of effort.

In deep despair, the monks imagined that they needed to transform themselves and their society in some fundamental way, like a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. They, however, had no idea how to begin such a process. They invited leaders from around the country to come and sit with them in contemplation and dialogue. Magically, a collective spirit began to emerge in their gatherings that they began to call "the fifth monk." With her help and following her guidance, they began to catch glimpses of the butterfly within themselves and society. These images began to form a new story about who they were and how they were to live together. Simultaneously, new processes of healing and reconciliation emerged that helped them let go of old wounds and patterns and together create a fundamentally different society where the once inevitable and recurring problems of the past were now inconceivable. The four monks, now very old and grey, sat again by the river in quiet contemplation and ate chocolate and drank wine in honour of the fifth monk.

- Tom Callanan
(shared by Alok Singh)

REUNITING ACTION WITH REFLECTION

Bridging Our Divided Selves

From Chandita Mukherjee

I identify a lot with the dichotomies of doing and understanding alluded to by many of the participants. Most of my working life has been a see-saw struggle to simultaneously analyse and synthesise. Because of the way my training got superimposed on my more "natural" self — If I'm telling a tale, I'm so much into that, that I can't analyse what it may mean. Yet if I get my critical faculties going, I get inhibited and can't tell the story any more.

From Maria Glauser

Since I attend university I had to artificially divide my thoughts and praxis in two: what is said during the lessons about education, learning, doing research, values, techniques... and what I feel it is right.

From Lisa Aubrey

My work with and about NGOs leaves me both optimistic and realistic — optimistic because there are people who are genuinely committed to making life better for all of us and who have given their lives to the struggle for development, equality, justice and peace....and realistic because the powers-that-be play *politricks* (much of it called development programs) to ensure that the hegemonic dominance of the GN will not be threatened. As they have used slave trades, colonialism, neocolonialism, they will use SAPs, "free trade," "democratization," debt, "development," wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, you-pick-a-country to ensure that they sit on top of us at all costs. This is not the type of world in which I want to live.

From: Barkat Shah

Along with mass media, privileged schooling has also banned the instinctive process of reflection and dialogue. It is comprised on the mechanistic and fragmented processes. The communication through these channels has been of statemental and abstract fashion, which does not permit the learners to initiate a dialectical and organic process of reality investigation. Through which the process of consciousness could be promoted. For the restoration of humanity it is needed to initiate a process of dialogue with the marginalized (whose humanity have been at the stack). it is necessary to use the dialogical approaches for dialectical interaction with the group of the people.

As it is by practice that some one learn swim, it also needs practice to become an outstanding singer, similarly, for challenging the set paradiagm, or changing the status quo it is necessary to practice for the preparation of change. Theory alone can not liberate the masses; it needs bulks of experiences for forging change.

From: Nitin Paranjape

It was after a game of dodge-ball that we played recently and a comment-made by one of the player that set the thinking process rolling. He said that his learning from the game was that the men were throwing the ball at the women and vice versa. We were equal number of men & women. I asked loudly whether it was a learning or his observation? He asked what's the difference? and I have been thinking, yeah, what's the difference?

In another instance, railway tickets from my office were booked for the wrong date, causing great discomfort to our

group travelling from Delhi to Nashik. Then a few days later the same mistake was repeated. Now I think why did this happen when there was a lot of discussion on its cause in the first instance. Was there no learning? Or is it linked to an attitude of casualness? Or is it rooted to a deeper malady of fragmented life where one action seldom has any relation to another? So in a fragmented collection of varied moments, does learning too remain untouched and isolated?

The challenge is to make meaning from our engagements, seeking connections with other actions for our own life and that of our communities. I see this as nourishment to become creative, reach out to others and collectively evolve ways of living life on our own terms that would enable learning society to unfold.

From: Ravi Gulati

If 'understanding' something itself exists in a multi-layered state, where we stop 'peeling' seems to me to be of crucial importance. Then there's the question of whether we stop temporarily or permanently, whether it's a pause or a full stop. A learning community may, perhaps, be defined as one where, throughout life, there are only pauses, no full stops... I think it's important for all of us to question, and to continue to question, even after we have our working answers for the moment, our beliefs and where they really come from. This constant learning needs to inform all our actions, if we are to participate intimately in, to play our roles in nurturing healthy communities.

"How I have come to the circle of learning societies is interesting. I have been working in World Bank Loan Education Programs and was continuously having problems understanding the huge spending and associated corruption and the misery of school going child. This furnished my association with IDSP, which has different concepts of development, education and social reconstruction. At IDSP, I have been fortunate to have a group to discuss, learn and unlearn the myths and concepts associated with learning and its paradigm. How education is political and how it drives agendas. Interesting albeit horrifying. Therefore I decided to unlearn many mechanical things and move towards some degree of personal achievement in terms of working with the real people for the real people."

Ali Naqvi

"I am at a turning point in my life and need to decide which way to go. working in an extremely hierarchical and bureaucratic organisation, I realise it is not the place for a person like me who wishes to live life on her own terms. But in the past few years, I have made so many compromises for marriage, for family, for being "successful" that I no longer know what life on my own terms means. Is it defying a boss who is deliberately obstructing my work, or is the challenge in learning to play her game - but then how does one win while keeping one's spirit and the spirit of one's work intact?"

Tasqeen Machhiwala