

Review of *Neohumanist Educational Futures: Liberating the Pedagogical Intellect* (edited by Sohail Inayatullah, Marcus Bussey and Ivan Milojević)

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Sohail Inayatullah, Marcus Bussey and Ivan Milojević's (2006) *Neohumanist Educational Futures* should be compulsory reading for those working in the field of education as well as those wishing to reconnect with their world. It anticipates a healing of mind, body and spirit by arguing for a holistic and ethical re-engagement with nature, the earth and human relationships. The authors challenge the orthodoxies of western epistemology and the legacy of absolute belief in the superiority of the human species. In arguing for a new ethical consciousness in education, they promote a philosophy of connectivity through integrating Eastern (Tantric) meditative and reflective empiricism and Western inquiry that will provide innovative and regenerative learning environments in the twenty-first century.

In its philosophical stance, neohumanism distinguishes its moral and ethical philosophy from the liberal-humanist nexus of western political and intellectual traditions and modern and post-modern notions of human and social progress. Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar explains the core difference between neohumanism and traditional humanism. Neohumanism is 'the philosophy which will make people understand they are not merely ordinary creatures...it...will liberate them from all inferiority and defects and make them aware of their own importance; it will inspire them to build a new world' (p.98). The guiding narratives of neohumanism promote partnership models in education rather than the traditional dominator models that have literally violated the soul and spirit of children's curiosity and intelligence *and* their relationships to their community and to the natural world.

Situating the spiritual in education is not just a matter of theology but a need for a reawakening of *being* in the world. The sense in which Inayatullah and others conceptualise a pedagogy of liberation in education is through an empathetic 'wisdom directed curricula' (Avadhuta, p. 170). As advocates of holistic education, the authors draw from the traditions of Indian and Eastern philosophy and mysticism; however it would be presumptive to dismiss the rationale as simply idealistic and theoretically vapid.

In Chapters one to five, various authors trace the theoretical and historical pathways of Western consciousness to unravel networks of knowledge that have shaped traditional educational thinking and practice. Marcus Bussey has tabulated how the core values symbolised by terms such as *humanist, utilitarian, romantic, democratic, green, spiritual* are enacted pedagogically through power-authority models of educational delivery (pp. 14-15). Vedaprajnanandra Avadhuta describes the shortcomings of traditional humanism (centred on religious values) and secular humanism (promoting utility values – earth and species serve humanity) as an inability to accept or recognise the *existential* value of living species (animals and plants). As an embracing philosophy, neohumanism acts as a wake-call about how we relate to our world to redress societal, environmental and educational malaise. Future thinking pedagogies, such as those promoted by Inayatullah et al, require an unpacking of the ways in which an education has come to be represented in contemporary contexts. Contemporary

educational thinking in the Australian context exemplifies the core problem of pedagogical reform in education. Visions for the future are hamstrung by the emergence of liberal-conservative discourses and desires to return to traditional value systems based on ‘character development’; ‘control and accountability’; and ‘discipline’ (Milojević, pp. 55-79).

How to reform contemporary education structures and performance-based educational discourses is a critical task for Inayatullah et al., when challenging dominant discourses in education. Here, criticisms about idealism could surface in terms of how to persuade educators and educational authorities that a holistic, spiritual and ecological education will ‘work’ as a mainstream pedagogy. As Marlene de Beer has indicated, ‘soft’ learning jars at the hard centre of traditional pedagogy and the way in which knowledge is delivered and bound up as a commodity of exchange in contemporary market-bound economies (pp. 202-226). As de Beer argues, calling for a new pedagogy in education does not mean to soften or relax the need for disciplined inquiry. Critical spirituality seeks to ‘break down the intellectual prudery of those who are attached to their own discipline and have little capacity to envision beyond narrow and self imposed confines’ (Bussey cited, p.219). It offers another space of analysis developed from critical forms of inquiry and a philosophical stance that seeks to deconstruct and reveal the under layers and effects of power and inequality across society.

The strength of the book comes from the respective authors’ capacities to appreciate and respect the traditions of both Western and Eastern philosophies when conceptualising what neohumanism offers to the field of education. The core philosophies of truth and meaning, integrity and well-being, self-discipline, are not dissimilar, but the manner in which each has achieved those pedagogical goals historically, culturally and socially, diverges quite sharply. Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar’s ideas on neohumanism exemplify how paradigms of western rationality are basically fragile in terms of assuming that the rationale of scientific and technological logic holds precedence over all other forms of human intelligence. Neohumanism literally requires a stripping away of contemporary expressions of materialism, nationalism, class, race, individualism, species superiority, that reinforce such egocentricity so that a new thinking and social order can be achieved. This is not just a wish list for change. Senior corporate executives reported a profound shift in their corporate thinking in moving from an “I” sense of self to a “We” as the self of a collective when they experienced the different layers of Sarkar’s ‘social circle’ (Hayward and Voros, pp. 283-296).

This book also comes with practical advice on how to implement a neohumanist curriculum in pre-schools by showing how to creatively engage children’s imaginations and play that will enhance physical and psychological well-being. Conceptual explanations are provided for those who wish to familiarise themselves with Indian, Buddhist and Zen philosophies and with peace oriented concepts. As evidence that neohumanist curricula can be adapted in school contexts, the case study of the River School in Queensland showed how that school community faced issues of behaviour management. They encouraged students to take responsibility for their actions and language and implemented curricula that celebrated multiculturalism, diversity and racial tolerance. In enacting the school philosophy of nurturing students, teachers and parents, the school also recognised that further challenges lay ahead and that there were ‘many new skills to develop’ in response to social, cultural and environmental change (pp. 307-321).

This is a challenging book for educators, teachers, parents and the broader community. It raises questions about why we continue to inflict an educational system more in common with nineteenth-century philosophies of discipline and punish than being excited by the possibilities of generating learning philosophies and practices in tune with the souls, hearts and minds of learners, teachers, and communities. Holistic education focuses on *being* in the



world and reconnecting to our world through integrative curricula doing, learning, and generating knowledge.

Reference

Inayatullah, Sohail, Bussey, Marcus, & Milojevic, Ivana (Eds.). (2006). *Neohumanist Educational Futures: Liberating the Pedagogical Intellect*. Tamsui and Taipei: Tamkang University Press in association with Gurukula Press and Metafuture.org., Queensland, Australia.

Reviewer

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