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Worldview Transformation and the Development of Social Consciousness

Abstract: *In this paper, we examine how increasing understanding and explicit awareness of social consciousness can develop through transformations in worldview. Based on a model that emerged from a series of qualitative and quantitative studies on worldview transformation, we identify five developmental levels of social consciousness: embedded, self-reflexive, engaged, collaborative, and resonant. As a person's worldview transforms, awareness can expand to include each of these levels, leading to enhanced prosocial experiences and behaviours. Increased social consciousness can in turn stimulate further transformations in worldview. We then consider an educational curriculum to facilitate the understanding of worldview and the cultivation of social consciousness as core capacities for twenty-first century students and global citizens.*

Introduction

Each person has his or her own personal story about the nature of reality. Genetic tendencies, religion, culture, and geographic region, together with all the experiences people have both internally and in relationship to their environments, give rise to their *worldview*, or their general way of viewing themselves and the world around them.

Worldview is one aspect of consciousness. Psychological, social and neurophysiological theories of development indicate that as we

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grow and interact with the world we learn to categorize, discriminate, and generalize about what we see and feel (Flavell, Miller and Miller, 2002; Siegler and Alabali, 2005). A worldview combines beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values, and ideas to form a comprehensive model of reality. Worldviews also encompass formulations and inter-pretations of past, present, and future. In our worldviews, we con-struct complex conceptual frameworks to organize our beliefs about who we are and about the world we live in. Worldviews function in similar ways to the internal working models proposed by Bowlby (1969) and elaborated by Bretherton and Munholland (1999). These models arise from interactions with primary attachment figures, and 'provide a framework for understanding new experiences and guiding social interaction' (Shaver, Collins and Clark, 1996, p. 39). World-view is a broader construct that is influenced by more than interac-tions with attachment figures, but similarly provides the holder a belief structure within which to organize perceptions and new experi-ences within the context of their social and physical environment.

Human perceptions are filtered by the ways people view the world. People's worldviews therefore influence every aspect of how they understand and interact with the world around them. Worldviews pro-foundly impact individual and shared goals and desires, shaping per-ceptions, motivations and values both consciously and unconsciously. Worldviews inform human behaviour in relationships and choreo-graph individual and social reactions and actions every moment of the day.

Worldview Transformation

Some aspects of worldviews are dynamic and some are stable over time. Responses based on apparently solid belief structures (such as the belief in free-will vs. destiny, for example) can be manipulated with subtle unconscious priming (Vohs and Schooler, 2008; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2001). At the same time, worldviews can become quite rigid over time and resistant to change, even when new contrasting information is presented (Cook-Greuter, 2000; Dunbar, 2008). Yet there are times when an experience is so profound, or shifts people's steady state in such a fundamental way, that they are forced to change the way they view the world (Keltner and Haidt, 2003; Miller and C'de Baca, 2001). When worldviews change, new possibilities can emerge, even within the same set of circumstances. Worldview transformation, then, is a fundamental shift in perspective that results in long-lasting changes in people's sense of self, perception of

relationship to the world around them, and way of being (Schlitz, Vieten and Amorok, 2008).

Such major transformations can be distinguished from minor alterations in people's conceptual understanding of the world. Dunbar and colleagues (2007) note the distinction between minor and major changes in concepts. For the latter, which are relatively rare, there is a 'reorganization of the relations both between features of a conceptual structure and between different conceptual structures' (p. 194). While psychological development and maturation most frequently are thought to involve the addition of knowledge and changes in what people know, transformation involves epistemological changes in *how* they know what they know. It is not only behaviour that changes, but also the motivational substrate from which that behaviour arises. It is not only a change in what people do, but also in who they understand themselves to be at an ontological level.

Of course, not all worldview transformations are prosocial. Some transformations can result in thinking patterns and behaviours that are detrimental to the individual, others, society and the natural world. Environments like that of Nazi Germany, and the presence of terrorist training camps, brainwashing strategies, and cults, for example, can all lead to more constricted, fear-based, threat-oriented, intolerant, or narrow views of the world and a person's place in it (Zimbardo, 2007). While the scope of this paper does not allow for a complete exploration of this topic, we hypothesize that these kinds of restrictive shifts in worldview arise from a different process than transformations that are life affirming and prosocial. Our research, briefly summarized below, shows that several factors can be linked to whether a potentially transformative experience becomes traumatic — resulting in greater constriction and fear — or transformative — resulting in greater well-being and an increase in altruism and other-regarding emotions such as compassion, gratitude, or forgiveness (Vieten, Schlitz and Amorok, 2006).

Background

In 1997, a multidisciplinary team of researchers at the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) initiated a series of studies focused on the process of worldview transformation. The goal has been to understand the process by which people experience fundamental shifts in perception that alter how they view and interact with themselves and the world around them. In particular, our team investigated factors

that facilitate the kind of worldview transformations that result in increased social consciousness and prosocial behaviour.

This programme of research included analysis of individual narratives of personal transformation, three focus groups with teachers of transformative processes, in-depth interviews with 60 representatives of ancient and modern transformative traditions (Schlitz *et al.*, 2008), surveys of over 1500 people who had experienced their own transformations (Vieten, Cohen and Schlitz, in prep), two longitudinal studies of participants involved in community-based transformative practice programmes (Vieten, Cohen, Schlitz, Radin and Estrada-Hollenbeck, in prep), and a study on how engagement in transformative practices affects health and well-being. Through this research programme, we have identified a process by which worldview transformation occurs, leading to expanded social consciousness (Vieten *et al.*, 2009).

In this essay, we explore the role of worldview transformation in the development of explicit social consciousness. We advance a naturalistic model that identifies five nested levels of social consciousness. We then describe the translation of this model to a curriculum on worldview literacy for students K-12, designed to foster social consciousness in a standards-relevant experiential pedagogy.

Social Consciousness

We use the term social consciousness in this paper to denote *conscious awareness of being part of an interrelated community of others*. When used this way, social consciousness refers to the level of explicit awareness a person has of being part of a larger whole. It includes the level at which one is aware of how he or she is influenced by others, as well as how his or her actions may affect others. It also includes an understanding that there are many factors shaping experience that lie below the threshold of conscious awareness.

Ammentorp (2007) defined the development of social consciousness as a 'process involving increasing awareness of social historical context, the ability to think abstractly about time and place, and beyond the immediate everyday conditions to understand individual experience as embedded in a broader system of social relations' (p. 39). While it is clear that people are social beings from the very beginnings of life — and that social relations shape every aspect of one's being (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001; Vygotsky, 1987; Van der Veer and Valsiner, 1994; Siegel, 1999; Schore 2000) — there is developmental variability in the extent to which people are explicitly aware of

the impact that culture and society have on them, and that they, in turn, can have on their environment.

At the most narrow level of social consciousness, individuals lack explicit awareness of their relatedness to others or the extent to which they are impacted by or impact others. At the most expanded level, people become more explicitly aware of their interdependence with others, and their ability to influence and be influenced by them. When worldview shifts from a primarily self-centred mode to one in which the self is experienced as an integral part of a larger whole, people report becoming more compassionate and service-oriented, and inspired to act as agents for positive change in their immediate communities and beyond (Vieten *et al.*, 2008).

Speaking to this point, Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus (1997) describe a set of post-modern practices that 'embrace change as the supreme good' — leading to a greater engagement with social consciousness (p. 10). In the process, everyday social actions can lead to entrepreneurship, citizen virtue, and what the authors refer to as solidarity cultivation. Through the identification of positive and affirming images of the possible human (Berman, 1997; Harman, Markley and Campbell, 1981; White, 1994; Zimbardo, 2007), individuals may move what is implicit in their worldview into explicit form. They may then be able to translate their worldview transformation into actions that foster sustained prosocial individual and collective beliefs and behaviours.

Five Nested Levels of Social Consciousness

In this section, we consider how increasing levels of social consciousness can develop through worldview transformation. Literature from multiple disciplines informs this model, including psychology, anthropology, sociology, neuroscience, management, and education, revealing five levels of social consciousness. The development of social consciousness corresponds to a series of transformations in worldview, and enhanced social consciousness stimulates further transformations in worldview.

The five levels of social consciousness (Figure 1) that we have identified include: (1) *embedded*, where consciousness is shaped without conscious awareness by social, cultural and biological factors and which is a kind of presocial consciousness; (2) *self-reflexive*, in which people gain awareness of how their experiences are conditioned by the social world through reflection and contemplative practices; (3) *engaged*, in which people are not only aware of the social environment, but begin to mobilize an intention to contribute to the

greater good in some outwardly directed way; (4) *collaborative*, in which people see themselves as a part of the collective and begin to work with others to co-create or shape the social environment by collaborative actions, such as collective inquiry, social networking and learning; and (5) *resonant*, in which people report a sense of essential interrelatedness with others — a field of shared experience and emergence that is felt and expressed in social groups, and that stimulates social transformation.
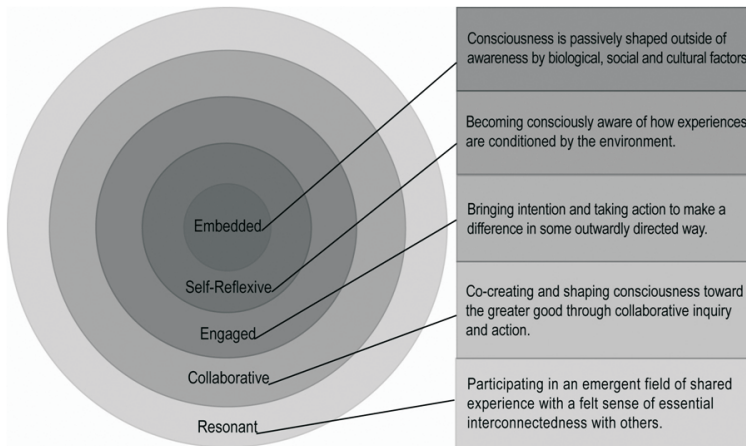

Figure 1: Five Levels of Social Consciousness

Embedded Social Consciousness

There is a vast literature exploring the impact of psychological, social and cultural factors in the shaping of human experience. Sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and historians alike have found that people's worldviews shape their experience of reality (Collins and Pinch, 1998; Schlitz, Wiseman, Watt and Radin, 2006). In large part, worldviews are influenced by factors that lie outside of conscious awareness, including shared beliefs, values, and social attitudes. At the embedded level of social consciousness, a person's understanding of his or her relationship to the larger social system, and of how individuals are influenced by and influence their environment, is implicit, primarily residing outside of conscious awareness. It is seen here as a baseline for the development of social consciousness as defined above.

Within critical theory, the ideological and hegemonic nature of power relations is shown to shape lived experience and subjectivity

(e.g., Bourdieu, 1987). Through this theoretical lens, individual worldviews are socially embedded and controlled by large-scale social and economic forces (Macpherson, 1962; Zaretsky, 1976; Zimbardo, 2007). The construction of personal and social identity is deeply influenced by economic factors involving the rise of material-ism, capitalism, and the objectification of nature (Abram, 1996). From this perspective, society has a determining effect and human agency is downplayed.

At the same time, the relationship of self to society is a complex and ongoing dialectic. Human choice and creativity play a liberating role, allowing the ongoing unfolding of human expression as history dem-onstrates the power, ingenuity, and resilience of the human spirit (Urban, 1996).

While an individual's sense of self continues in part to be defined by group membership and the social roles we play (Goffman, 1959; Mauss, 1938), globalization and mass media reveal the disintegration of fixed or static worldviews. Emerging is a more expansive way to speak about personal identity in that it suggests the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of development in which experiences of self involve multiple forms of engagement (Spinosa *et.al.*, 1997). While at one time culture may have offered a limited set of roles for its members, today 'more persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of possible lives offered by mass media' (Appadurai, 1996, p. 53). The formation of personal worldviews and social consciousness becomes even more complex in the information age and the reality of avatars and virtual identities (Boellstorff, 2008). However, despite the influx of potential identities, the majority of people tend to naturalize social forces, unaware of their construction by political, economic, and cultural interests.

Social and cultural factors interact with human cognitive and biological processes to limit conscious awareness. Studies of inattentional or perceptual blindness (Simons and Chabris, 1999) illustrate how human brains are 'hard-wired' to exclude information that does not fit into their current meaning system. It appears that the brain plays a role in limiting transformations in worldview (Freeman, 1995; Turner and Whitehead, 2008). The results of research by Dunbar (2008) show that 'data inconsistent with one's expectations are treated as errors and thus not easily incorporated into one's knowl-edge representation' (p. 200). fMRI studies with scientists and science students (Dunbar *et al.*, 2007) suggest that the learning centre of the brain (i.e., the caudate and parahippocampal gyrus) responds favour-ably to theory-confirming data. At the same time, the brain triggers

inhibiting responses in the error detecting portion (anterior cingulate cortex and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex) that helps filter out information that doesn't match a person's presuppositions.

To varying extents, people can function throughout their adult development with relatively little explicit social consciousness. While there may be a fundamental awareness of being in relationship with others, and navigating the world in part through social interactions, people can have very little understanding of how their perceptions, motivations, actions, and reactions are being shaped by biology and by their history of and current systems of social interaction. They can have even less awareness of how their actions affect those around them. There can be a somewhat limited sense of self as a separate and autonomous 'I', who is not influenced much by, and has little capacity to influence, the larger social system. But often, experiences occur in people's lives that disrupt this view, and lead them into self-reflection.

Self-reflexive Social Consciousness

Scientists, scholars, and contemplative teachers are beginning to work together to study processes by which it is possible for people to gain greater awareness of how they are conditioned by the biological, social and physical world in which they are embedded, and, in so doing, to recognize a broader picture of human potential.

Here the emphasis is on developing 'metacognitive' awareness. Psychologist and religious historian Louise Sundararajan (2002) emphasizes that it is the capacity for self-reflexivity — the ability to step back and reflect upon our thought process — that stimulates worldview transformation. From the confessional in the Catholic tradition, to insight meditation in the Buddhist tradition, to taking inventory of one's behaviour in steps four and ten of twelve-step programmes, transformative traditions often include practices to cultivate the capacity for self-reflexivity. According to Sundararajan (2002), this ability may be linked to transformations in worldview 'because it can bring you back to square one, from which place radical revision of your model of the world becomes possible' (p. 178). Similarly, developmental psychologist Howard Gardner (2006) asserts that 'a key to changing a mind is to produce a shift in the individual's "mental representations" — the particular way in which a person perceives, codes, retains, and accesses information' (p. 5).

Developmental models have historically placed less focus on skills of self-reflection, metacognition, and cognitive flexibility in favour of developing ego strength, a strong sense of self, or a cohesive belief

structure. However, one of the most significant impacts of self-reflexivity is increased cognitive flexibility. Learning to hold beliefs as the best working hypothesis one has at the moment, and being consciously willing to change belief systems, increases the likelihood of developing the ability to hold and consider multiple points of view, to engage with difference, and to find comfort in unfamiliarity (Schlitz *et al.*, 2008). As pointed out by Pitner and Sakamoto (2005), self-reflection is a process and a practice that requires support as it may trigger cognitive and affective 'roadblocks' that require people to look at their own biases. Learning to understand that our view of self and the world is only ever partial can ease the discomfort that may arise and invite the development of capacities that allow people to adapt successfully to ever-changing conditions.

When individuals experience greater self-reflexivity and social consciousness, they can become increasingly aware of the ways in which biology, psychology, and culture inhibit conscious awareness of or attention to the states of others. It can also lead to the development of prosocial behaviours and lifestyle orientations. Psychologist Daniel Goleman (2006), whose writing has been foundational in the development of social and emotional intelligence as an educational pedagogy, explains: 'Simply paying attention allows us to build an emotional connection. Lacking attention, empathy hasn't a chance' (p. 51). As people become more aware of their own perspective and biases, they are able to see and feel things to which they might otherwise remain blind.

As people mature in their capacity to respond consciously to the physical and social world, further subtle and dramatic changes in worldview become possible, even in the face of contrasting social pressures. Social consciousness can develop with the understanding that a person's social system has a history, that it changes over time, and that through the cultivation of one's own awareness, an individual can participate in its dynamic unfoldment.

Engaged Social Consciousness

As noted above, with increased self-reflexivity comes a shifting awareness not only of the individual self, but also of the relationship to others and to the world. This alone represents an increase in social consciousness. But as individuals develop further, this passive awareness can develop into a desire to *engage* actively in improving the wellbeing of others and the world. When people experience being situated in a social world, and connected explicitly and implicitly to local

and global communities, they may be drawn to civic responsibility for the common good (Ammentorp, 2007; Spinosa *et al.*, 1997). Seeing the plight of those who are suffering, for example, can lead to passive sympathy, but when a person has the sense that their participation in their social environment has an impact, they often awake to a desire and intention to relieve that suffering, either directly or through the choices they make and the way they direct their energy and other resources (Sze and Kemeny, 2004).

Recent theory focuses directly on the role of worldview in the development of social consciousness and engaged action. Educator, Sheldon Berman (1997) asserts that moral sensibilities emerge far earlier than many moral developmental theorists suggest. A move toward activism is 'more grounded in one's sense of connectedness, one's identification with morality, and one's sense of larger meaning and purpose than in the factors that political theorists propose' (Berman, 1997, p. 9). Based on his work in the classroom, Berman argues that perspective taking and conflict management are more central to the development of social consciousness and social responsibility than prescriptive recommendations often indicate. He further points out that Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1974) can be seen as a continuum in the development of perspective-taking. By building on the work of Berkowitz and Gibbs (1983), Berman (1997) notes that transformation is best facilitated by engaging in conversations that consider the perspective of another. He advocates for educating people to become social activists by bringing together psychology, moral development, prosocial behaviour, citizenship education, and political socialization in innovative ways that promote self awareness and inspire them to see opportunities to apply conscious action with the intention of making a difference in some outwardly directed way.

In addition to anecdotes and qualitative data collected by educators and social psychologists, science is increasingly demonstrating that humans are predisposed to connect. Data from interpersonal neurobiology, for example, suggests that the human brain develops through close attachments to other people; beginning with their mothers, fathers, and extended family, and then moving out to the broader community (Cozolino, 2006). Additionally, a growing body of evidence suggests that people's brains respond and grow through pathways of meaning, born with a built-in capacity and drive to search for purpose and to reflect on their role in relationship to others and to their environment. The field of neuroscience is just beginning to understand how brains themselves exist in relationship to other brains.

Research examining neural plasticity, mirror neurons (Rizzolatti and Craighero, 2004), and the biology of attachment directs us toward an understanding of the brain itself as a social organ built through experience and engagement (Cozolino, 2006; Siegel, 1999).

Collaborative Consciousness

As people gain greater awareness of themselves in relation to social issues and challenges, they also may experience a growing desire not only to take individual action, but also to participate in co-creating solutions with others. Rather than learning abstractly about global situations, a growing number of organizations and institutions are recognizing the importance of engaged social consciousness. Within education, there is an increasing focus on participatory learning, service learning, and project-based learning, all of which emphasize collaborative action. Studies on student learning (Johnson and Johnson, 1986; Gokhale, 1995; Webb, 1985) have yielded compelling evidence that cooperative teams retain information longer and achieve at higher levels of thought than students who work quietly as individuals. Through collaboration, students have opportunities to engage in discussion, take personal responsibility for their learning, and to become critical thinkers (Totten, Sills, Digby and Russ, 1991).

When people begin to engage actively with the world around them and with others, initially it can be viewed as an endeavour to 'help', or a mission to save others. Like charity, this type of action can be seen as a one-way street — 'I will give to you'. But with increasing awareness, the limitations of this mindset can be seen and it can be recognized that engagement with the world and others must be collaborative rather than prescriptive. There are ways in which a shared cognition can take form in social engagement (Whitehead, 2001). A key mechanism for the activation of this cognition is empowering conversation. Through the sharing of stories, experiences, and ideas, people begin to recognize that solutions must be co-created with all involved, especially those who are being 'helped'.

Various processes have been developed to enhance the nature of collaborative social consciousness through discourse and conversation. Forums have been created to access group collective intelligence and wisdom through an engagement in the intersubjective space between people. Wisdom Cafés, Open Space Technology, and Bohmian Dialogue Groups offer approaches to shared consciousness and explorations of worldviews. AI and computer based models have been developed to study the process of collaboration in groups and

provide methods of analysis (Dillenbourg, Baker, Blaye and O'Malley, 1996). Through dialogic approaches, collaborations are formed to engage people in common purpose, shared knowledge, intelligent decisions, and to call forth life-affirming actions together. Through a process of 'thinking together' collectively, group participants can examine their preconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices, as well as a more general movement of thought. From the perspective of social mirror theory, Whitehead (2001) notes that different levels of consciousness, such as those described here, emerge in accordance with what the social environment can reflect. Thus, in order for consciousness to expand, private experience must be expressed publicly.

Given the human ability to learn by example, the presence of positive role models also helps bring individuals into relationship with others in a mutually life-enhancing way. As Zimbardo (2007) has suggested, offering role models can help people find their way to prosocial behaviours, rather than actions that work only in the interest of the individual, or even in opposition to the greater good. In the process, there is the possibility of a worldview shift that includes a shared identity around collaboration and shared purpose (Spinosa *et al.*, 1997), while acknowledging healthy individuality.

Resonant Consciousness

In addition to exploring the phenomenon and development of shared discourse and action, there is a growing literature that informs the theory of social consciousness as a field of shared experience and emergence that is felt and expressed in social groups. At this level, descriptions of social consciousness involve experiences that reportedly transcend the physical properties of the group. In our studies of transformational teachers, for example, informants commonly reported a sense of essential interdependence and interconnectedness with others as a stage in the worldview transformative process (Schlitz *et al.*, 2008). It is this level that we refer to as resonant consciousness.

Tickle-Degnan and Rosenthal (1990) offer three ingredients that they argue are essential in the establishment of resonant consciousness: shared attention, good feelings (evoked largely through tones of voice and facial expression), and coordination or synchrony. Drawing upon this work, Goleman (2006) asserts: 'People in rapport are animated, freely expressing their emotions. Their spontaneous, immediate responsiveness has the look of a closely choreographed dance, as though the call-and-response of the interaction had been purposefully

planned' (p. 30). He emphasizes that a perception of connection is dependent less on what's said than on the more intimate and direct unspoken emotional links. Self-awareness and comfort with others seems to be key to enabling this type of connection to be expressed.

Resonant consciousness has also been described in the context of transpersonal psychology. In reviewing this literature, Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) identified key themes that include states of consciousness that move beyond the ego or personal self, involving experiences of the transcendent or spiritual. Likewise Walsh and Vaughan (1993) describe transpersonal psychology as being concerned with experiences and related phenomena that connect people with a broader sense of self that expands beyond the individual. In these experiences, people report a kind of transpersonal dimension that expands social consciousness beyond the physical aspects of human engagement.

These notions are further developed by research such as that conducted over the past decade by the Institute of Heartmath, which has provided new insight into the physiology of relationship. This research has explored physiological coherence, which is associated with heart-brain synchronization and entrainment between diverse physiological systems. McCraty and colleagues (1996) explain that in this mode the body's systems function with a high degree of efficiency and harmony, and natural regenerative processes are facilitated. This measurable coherence intensifies when an individual shifts into a sincerely loving or caring state. In addition, Russek and Schwatz (1994) conducted experiments in which they showed the registration of one individual's cardiac signal in another's EEG recording when two people sat quietly opposite one another. This finding is intriguing as it offers initial scientific evidence for an inter-subjective resonant field that may exist when people experience emotional connection to another.

Additional research suggests interconnections between people that support transpersonal experiences of unity. In a series of controlled experiments, participants were isolated from one another while their physiology was being monitored. At random times through the session, one participant sent intentions to the distant person. Often the study used a closed circuit video system to project the image of the 'receiver' to the 'sender' in the distant room (Schlitz, Radin, Malle, Schmidt, Utts and Yount, 2003). A meta-analysis identified 40 studies using this procedure, known as distant mental interactions on living systems (DMILS), found 1,055 individual sessions conducted between 1977 and 2000 (Schmidt, Schneider, Utts and Walach, 2004). The overall results were significant with odds against chance of 1,000 to 1. Such

results, and others from the field of experimental parapsychology (see Radin, 2006) are evocative and provide a foundation for understanding the resonant nature of social consciousness.

Worldview Literacy: An Educational Programme to Enhance Social Consciousness

The model we have presented offers a path towards the cultivation of more explicit forms of social consciousness. It is not hierarchical in that one step does not lead in a linear fashion to another. Instead, we envision this model as a nested set of interrelated levels of social consciousness. It is integral in that as people move through the five levels of social consciousness, each level is simultaneously transcended and included (Wilber, 1997). When social consciousness matures, it does not leave behind the embedded level. Indeed, the fundamental influence of that level is recognized, as are the vital roles of self-reflexivity, engagement, collaboration, and resonance. This model does not negate the individual, nor does it point to people merging into a nameless mass. Rather, it leads to a grounded sense of belonging.

Encouraging people to explore consciousness in ways that invite them to become more balanced, compassionate, altruistic, appreciative of difference, able to hold complexity, cognitively flexible, and oriented toward prosociality is one of the most fundamental tasks facing society in the twenty-first century. Our model of worldview transformation — and its role in the development of social consciousness — has arisen primarily from a review of the literature and our own naturalistic observational studies — asking people to describe retrospectively how their worldview transformation occurred, or following people as they engaged in transformative processes. This careful observation has led us to predict that shifts in consciousness need not wait for random life-changing experiences, but can be invited through intentional practice and experiential education.

Based on these assumptions, our team has created a curriculum to facilitate the development of 'worldview literacy'. By describing worldview as a kind of literacy, we acknowledge it as a skill set and capacity that can be both taught and learned. A translational research initiative, The Worldview Literacy Project, is designed to catalyse the development of social consciousness by helping to increase awareness of the relationship between perception and experience. It also aims to help students appreciate different worldviews and ways of knowing about the world and their place in it. The programme is administered as a set of fifty-minute drop-in modules for high school

students (and others) that utilize inclusive dialogue and experiential activities to help them comprehend and communicate issues related to worldview. It is designed to be compliant with educational standards and to integrate with currently existing curricula in a broad spectrum of classroom settings.

The pedagogy is expressed through multi-media lesson plans, grounded in engaged conversation, experiential activities, explorations of positive role models, and collaborative learning projects. The programme is designed to offer adolescents, teens, and lifelong learners the ability to understand how their worldview affects their perception and behaviour, and by extension, how others' worldviews affect their perceptions and behaviour. Such exploration is intended to support young people becoming effective leaders, able to meet social, cultural, political, and environmental demands with strength and purpose. It also offers a methodology for creating a generative and life-affirming system of learning that encourages exploration of prosocial behaviour within a comparative and non-dogmatic environment.

Qualitative results from pilot programmes in five inner city Oakland, California, classrooms suggest that the curriculum and pedagogy have beneficial effects on students' development. It provides a platform from which they can better navigate complexity, be more self-aware, make choices with greater discernment, and have greater social and emotional intelligence. We have found that students discover a greater capacity for self-reflection and empathy. They report experiencing more comfort and less reactivity in unfamiliar situations, perceiving less separation when faced with diversity, and expanding their sense of in-group and community identification. In addition, teachers report that students are more engaged in the learning process, demonstrate greater attentiveness and class participation, are less prone to absenteeism, are taking an active interest in making a positive contribution to their school and home communities, and are expressing sensitivity to issues of global concern. Further testing will begin after completion of a trainers programme that will involve new teachers and new classrooms. We are also developing lesson plans that speak to worldview literacy in the context of health care and global business settings.

Conclusion

The dance between change and continuity has been at play throughout history. Today, we see a rapid rate of change that is calling on people to consider their worldview and to develop different identities and

ways of engaging with the world. It is clear that navigating life in the twenty-first century will require not simply the acquisition of new skills, but also the intentional cultivation of novel states of mind (Kegan, 1994; Gardner, 2004). Among those skills most essential for success in this new era of global connectivity will be greater cognitive flexibility, comfort with unfamiliarity, appreciation of diverse perspectives, agility in the face of rapidly changing circumstances, ability to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously, and a capacity for discernment that relies equally on intellect and intuition. These skills don't spring as much from what we know but instead from how we know it, and how we view the world. It is our contention in this essay that worldview literacy can help foster those skills in broad audiences. As worldviews transform, they adapt to include increasing levels of awareness of how people are interrelated to the world around them. It is in individual and shared mind-sets where psychological, physiological, and cultural forces may engage one another to promote social consciousness and to develop prosocial perceptions and actions.

Acknowledgements

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