Education and Values (17)

Education promotes and replicates values. Even when not promoted deliberately, values are communicated. Yet, neither the explicit nor the implicit promulgation of values is typically designed with thought to the appropriateness of these values for the future. Values are involved in curriculum choices, how the material is presented, and the range of “correct” answers. Focusing on the history of one’s own country promotes the value of chauvinism. Placing emphasis on presidents, generals, wars, and victories promotes the values of authoritarianism and militarism. Presenting subject material using a lecture style, reinforces the value of authoritarianism as does evaluating student progress based primarily on the ability to recite facts. To address these issues, an approach to values education has been proposed that uses moral dilemmas for discussion and encourages participation.

Educational institutions, teachers, parents, concerned citizens and children themselves must work to uncover and understand the values that are being taught as well as to design the entire educational experience to foster those values that will help make for a sustainable and healthy future.

Written by John Thomas

Dematerialization (18)

The production and consumption of products is destructive to the environment and is a contributing factor to poverty and hunger around the world. Dematerialization defines the reduction of material used per unit quality of life, that is, using fewer natural resources in products, using more recycled resources, and extending the life of products. Through industrial ecology we can determine best outcomes using a wider, more global outlook of the effects of our activities on the environment. Dematerialization may involve making a product smaller and lighter, replacing a material product with an immaterial substitute. One common example of this that we currently practice is the replacement of postal mail with E-mail. The growing role of knowledge, information, and culture should also make it possible to displace materials and energy with human intelligence and ingenuity. This would allow us to satisfy more basic human needs with far fewer resources. It would ostensibly also allow us to fit human economic activities within natural processes without disrupting them. Dematerialization is the future of an ecologically and economically balanced world.

Written by Burl Humana

Transforming Institutions (19)

Most social institutions are positioned to deliver services from their operational center out to the regions and the masses. Often, these institutions, leaders and corporate models protect and maintain their existence without regard for those they were intended to serve. The exploitation and destruction of the environment, the people and rural communities is the long term result. Institutions should (1) develop innovative and sustainable relationships with remote and rural communities that are built upon the principles of trust, sharing, respect and strength to ensure an equitable and fair existence for all to support a sustainable, transformative institutional model; (2) establish transformative change within their environments to engage as well as effectively communicate and share with the region their products and resources as a model for cooperative and collaborative development; (3) Create flexible institutional management models that can adjust to the changing and evolving needs of people so everyone has the opportunity to become engaged in these transformative efforts.

Written by Brian Beaton

Teaching to Transgress (20)

Students naturally identify with good teachers and value their knowledge highly. A possible side-effect, however, is that the student may become reluctant to “go against” the teaching of their mentor/hero/professor. This reluctance occurs with respect to individual teachers as well as to society as a whole.

To prevent stagnation of knowledge and of social progress, one useful strategy for teachers is to teach “transgression” as an integral part of their practice. Teaching to Transgress actively questions society’s “received wisdom” — it tests and rebels against it. The scope of the transgression should be wide and include all of a society’s rules, prejudices, and attitudes. Given the strength and vigor of societal maintenance, Teaching to Transgress must consider active mechanisms that work toward change. The impacts of change need to be carefully evaluated, of course, because not all changes, even well-intentioned ones, work well. Teaching to Transgress helps instills the idea that societies must change. It also carries responsibility for promoting stability against change when that’s appropriate. At the same time, however, the need for challenging the status quo has probably never been greater.

Written by John Thomas