

Education Embraced: Substantiating the Educational Foundations of Landmark Education's Transformative Learning Model

Marsha L. Heck¹

Abstract

In 2011, Renee Lockwood offered a "dissection of the religio-spiritual dimensions of Landmark Education." Dissecting *her* argument suggested a narrow categorization of basic human experiences as religio-spiritual; literature cited was from religious studies - absent teaching and learning research. Key distinctions of NRMs (New Religious Movements) - and the brief mention of shifting boundaries of secular and sacred generally speaking in western culture - were overlooked. Most critiques were of the *est training (est)* - last offered in 1984, while The Landmark Forum (the Forum) was first offered in 1991. This critique employed instead research of both classic and contemporary scholars who study teaching and learning. Lockwood's dissection scalpel was ultimately a means to verify the educational substance of Landmark Education's (Landmark) self-described "breakthrough technology" (2015). Rather, Landmark's holistic, transformational approach to education is not only appropriate for a culture shaped by the aforementioned shifting boundaries, but also valuable for those concerned about 21st century problems facing humanity.

Keywords: Transformative Education, Holistic Education, Landmark Education, The Landmark Forum

1. Introduction

1.1 Original Argument

Renee Lockwood (2011) argued through eight primary points that the personal and professional growth, training and development LLC, Landmark Education (Landmark) is a religious organization. She claimed that The Landmark Forum (the Forum): 1) was highly emotional, 2) incorporated Eastern spiritual practices and 3) resulted in religious effervescence. Agreeing that neither Eastern nor Christian deities were worshipped in the Forum, instead the 4) Sacred Collective and the 5) Self as sacred were reportedly deified. The Forum's results were described as 6) altering existing belief systems and 7) producing transformative miracles, and both as evidence of religio-spirituality. Each descriptor is substantiated as educational with appropriate literature.

Her argument could have ended with: "Whilst not a 'religion' in a traditional, theological sense, Landmark is certainly representative of numerous novel trends in Western spirituality, many of which are illustrated below in the examination of those dimensions of the group that are religio-spiritual in nature" (2011, p. 235). Rather, Lockwood's categorizations framed the Forum not as a 21st century educational experience, but a 19th century religious experience and view of humanity that separates human being into rigidly compartmentalized components. All references to Lockwood that follow are from her 2011 publication.

¹ Indiana University South Bend, 1700 Mishawaka Ave. South Bend, In, 46615 U.S.A. mlheck@iusb.edu, 574.520.4857

Leading educational scholars and public intellectuals are used to confirm that such dated views of education are unworkable for 21st century education, while Landmark offers a timely approach. Landmark *may* indeed be representative of those numerous novel trends that are seemingly “religio-spiritual.” However, this interesting perspective is not unique to Landmark. Ultimately - if indeed there is a trend in society toward groups that are not religio-spiritual being labeled as such, the problem may be with the label, not targeted organizations? In this rebuttal that question is addressed, and Landmarks’ educational focus verified.

1.2 Missing Elements

Literature and commentary focused primarily on the *est training (est)* last offered in 1984, while the Forum was first offered in 1991. Academic literature cited was from the field of Religious Studies – rather than Educational Research or scholars who know and study educational theory and practice. The field of study most frequently cited was NRMs (New Religious Movements) in which scholars consistently acknowledged a range of disagreement over what constitutes NRMs (Melton, 2004, p. 231; Chryssides, NRM D, pp. 19-23; NRM A, p. ix, Ch. 20; Ramstead, NRM B, pp. 196–203). Chyrssides explained comparisons and contrasts between NRMs and New Age, and that definitions vary (Chryssides, NRM C, p. 5); while Heelas noted that some see New Age and NRMs as the same (Heelas, p. 9).

Chryssides indicated in his encyclopedic collection of NRMs that Landmark is not regarded as religious (p. 198) as did Dr. Paul F. Knitter, Ph.D., former Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture at Union Seminary in NY, Emeritus of Theology at Xavier University, and published author to over a dozen books. A leading theologian of religious pluralism, Knitter’s perspective on Landmark is clear, and drawn from credentials including a licentiate in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and doctorate from the University of Marburg, Germany:

Landmark Education is not designed to be a religion, and in my estimation certainly is not a religion. Landmark Education cannot be termed a religion in any way that would make sense for a scholar of religion, and, I venture to say, for most ordinary people. I would strongly state that although the Forum may produce the results that many religions would affirm, it does so without any kind of religious grounding or framework. To call Landmark or The Landmark Forum a religion or religious in nature is to profoundly misunderstand religion. (personal conversation)

This Associate Professor of Education would further argue, “to call Landmark, or The Landmark Forum, religion or religious in nature is to profoundly misunderstand education.” An article from a religious scholar about shifts in western culture would have been interesting and a more appropriate alternative to the mischaracterization of Landmark as an NRM. As an educational scholar, this author will not discuss these shifts in depth, but must note the clearly defined lack of agreement in the field of religious studies about these labels; Lockwood based her arguments on a view of religion that is at best unresolved among scholars of religion, and at worst a misrepresentation of the field. Exclusively associating learning, growth, and problem solving in collective groups as religio-spiritual serves no scholarly purpose – neither adding new ideas to the field of religious studies or educational scholarship.

To be fair and most valuable, then, this response does more than counter the original arguments. General, brief critiques are made regarding the dated, compartmentalized, overarching view of education. These mischaracterizations of Landmark Education and the Forum, are neither valid nor reliable by academic standards, lacking: a) accurate theoretical context for the critique undertaken b) appropriate terminology and literature from the field of educational research; and c) scholarly data collection and analysis methodology.

2. The Rebuttal

Prior to substantiating the value of Landmark’s educational programs and approaches then, a critique of Lockwood’s fundamental methods and analysis is offered. The professional rigor of this rebuttal results in part from appropriate academic expertise and professional practices gained as an Associate Professor of Secondary and Foundations of Education in one of the three largest university systems in the U.S. from 1997 to the present. Further credibility for countering erroneous characterizations of Landmark, includes a) participating in and completing the Forum in 2002, reviewing in 2004, and taking an updated version in 2011; b) researching Landmark’s approach and practices for K-12 and teacher preparation on academic sabbatical leave; c) being trained by Landmark for that sabbatical research; and d) presenting academic peer-reviewed sessions about Landmark’s curriculum at national and international conferences (Heck, 2006, 2008, 2015). Accordingly, careful and rigorous considerations of educational scholarship and practice invite readers to consider conclusions that verify Landmark’s approaches as educational.

2.1 Substantive Concerns

The critique is levied specifically because Lockwood's "metaphoric dissection" missed more than one key scalpel - undertaken without attention to basic scholarly rigor. Rather, Lockwood:

- framed arguments in an uninformed and outdated view of education, and an arguably dated understanding of boundaries between education and religio-spirituality;
- analyzed an educational organization without the use of educational research, scholarship, or professional educational literature of any kind;
- relied on literature from NRM research which is speculative at best, about where to place Landmark Education in their various encyclopedic collections; and
- failed to follow scholarly guidelines for data gathered from human subjects.

Grouping Landmark with other educational programs claimed to be spiritual is a point of view. Understandable is an argument that an educational program seems to incorporate aspects of human experience consistent with those in religious practice. However, a claim that an educational organization is religio-spiritual in purpose, practice, or mission – a claim made with no support from educational literature – lacks scholarly merit or substance.

Arbitrary divisions between the religio-spiritual and education and a trend of shifting boundaries between them are not substantively addressed and definitions of each are lacking. Although Landmark education was not described as traditionally or theologically speaking a religion, it was claimed to be "representative of numerous novel trends in Western spirituality" (p. 235). However, rather than representative, the entire discussion was specific to Landmark, and focused on making a case for its religiosity rather than discussing trends. One must question to what degree religious studies scholars would agree that such boundary shifting is problematic or in need of dissecting.

Further, might human activities be classified as "both...and?" Regardless, the question is entirely overlooked, as are "the problematics of 'religion' within late Western Modernity" (Lockwood p. 226). Clearly, philosophers or scholars interested in boundaries between education and spirituality becoming less definitive may appropriately study Lockwood's claim that identified groups (pp. 228-233, 248) constitute the "problematics of religion" (pp. 231-235). What is not clear is if these scholars would see the question so simply – or if they would rather navigate the palpable complexities of human being, teaching, and learning in this rebuttal.

No matter how religion is defined, boundaries of complex systems – in this case where the religio-spiritual aspects of human experience stop and educational aspects begin – cannot be understood by limiting oneself to arbitrary and artificial boundaries of an otherwise complex human system. "Negotiating the border," as Palmer (1993) is known to advocate generally when speaking of the role of contemplation and spirituality *in higher education*, and in particular, "between religion and science is a complicated and contentious matter. Indeed, "one must look at its embeddedness and its intertwinings" (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 174).

The question of boundaries aside, the only definitive statement was found in the words of Christian theologian Paul Tillich (Lockwood pp. 247-249). While comparing the Forum to *est* is not a sound argument given the seven-year gap between the two offerings, even the critiques of the *est* training – when analyzed with the appropriate educational lens rather than distorted religio-spiritual arguments – are inaccurate. Even if one does not differentiate *est* and Landmark (and one most certainly should given the seven-year gap between them) the argument is speculative at best from a quick glance at other civic organizations - are the Boy Scouts, Rotary or Kiwanis religio-spiritual? At best, the term "implicit religion" used to describe secular spirituality, such as "I read the paper religiously," might apply (Bailey, 2004, p. 397). Bailey further negated the use of Tillich's "ultimate concern" and assured that it was more suited to students (p. 398). A similar mischaracterization of collective miracles, inaccurately paired Werner Erhard's comment about transforming whole communities with Bry's claim that Landmark's "sense of service, of mission" (p. 242) is paired with Western religion, to erroneously establish its religio-spirituality. Herein, educational scholars and experts are used to establish that an "either...or" matrix for understanding human experience is indisputable evidence of a dated educational paradigm.

Educational practitioners and researchers who favor a more holistic approach are utilized to verify Landmark's educational grounding. Noted public intellectual Sir Ken Robinson (& Aonica, 2015) explained in the afterword of his most recent book that those who practice and advocate "personalized and holistic education come from many cultures and perspectives. Included are Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, John Dewey, Michael Duane, Kurt Hahn, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Dorothy Heathcote, Jane Piaget, Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, Sir Alec Clegg, Noam Chomsky and many more..." (location 3752).

2.2 Theoretical context: What literature is needed?

The use of parapsychology, human potential, occultism, and personal development writing to discredit Landmark's educational purpose, is readily countered with the credibility of Renée Dominice's employment in adult education, a university degree from "the Union Theological Seminary in New York," and "doctoral degree in education at the University of Geneva" (p. xxiii). Dominice' is uniquely qualified to address the tensions among education and spirituality herein. To sort out what is said about NRMs and shifting boundaries, the work of educational scholar Edwin O'Sullivan is helpful. Acknowledging that his "are not household words in education," O'Sullivan addressed those very tensions by advocating for more permeable boundaries between education, "Nevertheless, we are beginning to see a concern in education that opens one to considering education as a spiritual venture (Palmer, 1993; Miller, 1993; Moffett, 1994)," and "the importance of the growth of our spirits" (1999, p. 263).

Such views have increased in the 20 some years since these publications. Shifting boundaries between the even more disparate disciplines of science and religion, were addressed by B. Allen Wallace of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion (CSSR) at Columbia University, in the volume *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (2007). Wallace maximized the strengths of two formally distinct disciplines in an entirely new field of study he named contemplative science, described as "a possible reconciliation and even integration" between science and religion" (p. 1).

By comparison, educational scholars similarly reconcile and integrate educational and spiritual distinctions. In *Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching* (2001), David T. Hansen, a professor of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, began with a key premise used in this rebuttal. About conceptions of teaching, Hansen explained that they "shape what researchers investigate," specifically, conceptions of what teaching is, and of what it is for, make a difference in educational thought and practice" (2001, p. 1). Hansen; Palmer, who wrote about education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change (1980, 200, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010); and other teachers and researchers are used to present conceptions of teaching that differ radically from dated opinions of what teaching is and what purpose it serves.

The Forum is transformational, not incremental learning. Taylor, Cranton, and Associates (2012) offered 573 pages of the most current up to date research, including reviews of previous studies that laid the foundation for current understanding of transformative education. A complex array of perspectives and range of ways in which spirituality and education increasingly overlap, were detailed (pp. 7–10), and boundaries such "as cognitive and rational, as imaginative and intuitive, as spiritual, as related to individuation, as relational, and as relating to social change," (p. 7) were described as fragile and "artificially set up to distinguish between them" (p. 8).

Dominice' is associated with Meziro, considered by some the starting point for any scholarly consideration of transformational and reflective learning. Dominice's words offer an affirmation of Landmark's educational value:

...for Mezirow and myself this view of the problem of understanding ways of adult thinking is largely influenced by the experiences we have had for years in training adult educators, both within and outside the academic circle. We have both thought about adult learning in a variety of professional contexts, all centered on human relationships such as teaching, caring, or helping. We have worked in the context of academic curricula in which the knowledge of oneself has had an important place. (p. 85)

O'Sullivan's (1999) call for educational reform *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century* is a dynamic example of where education is going. O'Sullivan also drew on the work of educator Rudolf Otto for a robust example of using data to realize multiple perspectives. Sir Christopher Ball (2007) said that 21st century curriculum needs greater focus on the development of skills and attitudes provided by transformative learning. Praised in reviews by nearly a dozen secular educators, writers, researchers and community leaders around the world, O'Sullivan's (1999) volume included references to community, the cosmos, and love; and methodological discussions referenced Eastern traditions and encouraged individuals to learn in community with others.

Noted educator and public intellectual Sir Ken Robinson (2011) expressed a similar perspective about education as “a major part of the foundation that allows every young person to learn effectively and contribute positively to their own development and attainment and to the development of a good society” (p. 265). Finally, Lockwood mentioned Rudolph Otto, an “ultimate ‘high’ described by participants” and a “sense of the numinous being ‘unquestionably’ produced” (p. 226). Yet, speaking of awe and mystery, O’Sullivan (1999) also acknowledged Otto and encouraged educators to “let our sense of awe direct us in our understanding” (pp. 269–274).

2.3 Human subjects data: How was it collected and analyzed?

The design of appropriate research questionnaires is a complex process that must be carefully followed with precision and integrity (Office for Human Resource Protections, 1993, section D) if the results are to be considered valid and reliable according to academic standards. There is always a risk of subjects’ responses being influenced, even unknowingly despite careful consideration, by instruments that are poorly designed or administered. Equally important for scholarly rigor, the process used to analyze instrument data, including a means to guard against reviewer bias must be clearly explained, and, at a minimum, some ranking or rating scale is required. Claims such as “produce results akin to those described by Bry, if *only slightly milder and less graphic*” (Lockwood, p. 231) require a scale detailing standards used to assess “mild” and “graphic.” The only indication of how data were collected is mention of a questionnaire “devised specifically for this study” (p. 231). How questions for that questionnaire were designed, and how the human subjects who responded were chosen - was not detailed.

To further determine validity the ratio of survey respondents to either possible responses or appropriately representative research demographics is needed. In this case, the Forum is offered year round in more than 115 locations, in 19 countries worldwide (<http://www.landmarkworldwide.com/>), so to be valid, participant sampling must be similarly widespread, representative, and numerous (Office for Human Resource Protections, 1993, section D). How many participants, in which location(s), how they were asked to participate, and if there were incentives for doing so, identity protection, and more must be accounted for to ascertain the validity of the data regarding participants’ Landmark experiences. Similar measures to limit bias are required when anecdotal observations by researchers are cited. While it is incumbent that researchers acknowledge any possibility of bias on their part, in this case, Lockwood’s own Landmark Forum participation was described in a footnote as simply “experience of The Landmark Forum” (p. 240).

The disclosure that Lockwood attended the course in order to collect information reduces the scholarly rigor of objectivity, and compromises her status as a participant. The concept of a participant observer requires particular scholarly disclosures and safeguards not mentioned. She claimed that “gaining primary information on the group through personally participating in the Forum” enabled her “to filter the publicly available information accurately” (p. 231). What educational scholars term *Deep Understanding* (Leithwood, McAdie, Bascia, & Rodriguez, 2006) requires fully engaging with the course as opposed to a self-described and clearly biased aim of achieving “an experiential understanding of the religio-spiritual dimensions of the group” (p. 231).

2.4 Summary

To review, the Landmark Forum was misjudged utilizing a dated and misinformed view of the discipline of education, missing appropriate educational literature, and based on questionable data that was misinterpreted using unclear analytical approaches. The literature used was primarily from the field of NRM, missing substantive considerations of principles and practices consistent with educational experiences. By comparison, Hansen’s (2001) conception of good teaching “involves enriching, not impoverishing, students’ understandings of self, others, and the world. It means expanding, not contracting, students’ knowledge, insight, and interests. It means deepening, not rendering more shallow, students’ ways of thinking and feeling. And, it entails paying intellectual and moral attention as a teacher” (2001, p. ix). Lockwood’s conception was impoverishing, contracting, and rendered students’ educational experiences as shallow while ignoring teachers’ moral responsibility to their students, the profession, and the culture.

3. Education Embraced

A discussion of the educational validity and reliability of Landmark Education's methods over time, requires literature from educational - rather than religious - studies. The counter proposal is that Landmark is an educational business model, and that the flagship course offering, the Forum, an educational experience. First, a) a counterpoint to the general questions: "Is it education? Is it religion?" Then, a discussion of b) educational motivation, c) democratic education, and d) the learning process found in the Forum follow.

3.1 Counterpoint: Revisiting Definitions

An overview of the educational tenets of Landmark Education precedes the more detailed substantiation provided by literature from educational studies. To review - arguing that carefully focusing teaching on the whole individual and intentionally designing learning in a dynamic community is religio-spiritual is an unnecessary exercise. By comparison, there are multiple educational contexts for the Forum and perhaps even the trend of shifting boundaries in western spirituality, when analyzed with substantive scholarly literature from the appropriate field of education. Ultimately, the definition of religion used to label Landmark as religio-spiritual belies in part a view of humanity that compartmentalizes the whole human being and human experiences - something leading educational scholars in this rebuttal have argued against.

Voices of contemporary educational scholars and public intellectuals instead provide a compelling demand for the holistic education seen as imperative for the 21st century. Compartmentalizing beliefs, relationships with others, emotions, and transformation from facts, individual learning, thoughts and mastery of facts was more common in the days of colloquial reading, writing, and arithmetic (e.g. Dick and Jane), or learning evoked by the cliché "just the facts ma'am. "In fact compartmentalization that limits thinking to inflexible knowledge silos is not conducive to teaching and learning in a complex world (Davis et al., 2000). Accordingly, this rebuttal goes beyond a rejection of religion to a substantive embrace of education. Viewed through the lens of the appropriate academic body of knowledge – there is no question of the educational context, rigor, or value of Landmarks' courses. What remains unanswered is the question of when rigorous academic exploration and spirited discourse about the educational considerations of Landmark will replace the irrelevant and uniformed mischaracterizations rebutted herein.

3.2 Counterpoint: Three Groups of Educational Characteristics

To, as accurately as possible, define the complexities of aforementioned mischaracterizations of Landmark as religious, the eight primary arguments are grouped for simplicity and clarity according to appropriate educational contexts. These three primary groupings: a) Educational Motivation (not religious fervor), b) Democratic Education (not deification of individual and community), and the c) Learning Process (not Eastern religious practice) are discussed. Definitions are drawn from not only classic educational scholarship but also contemporary educational research and practice to definitively substantiate the holistic and expansive nature of Landmark's transformative approach to education. According to Davis et al., (2000):

Teaching then, is all about effective transformations. In encouraging particular sorts of understandings, the teacher is supporting the development of particular worldviews and modes of perception. The associated classroom experiences are biological-and-social events. On the sub-personal level, for example, they contribute to actual physical transformations in brain structure, as well as to other physiological changes. On the personal level, they frame how one sees and acts. On the interpersonal level, they influence collective dynamics as they affect how people think and relate to one another. On supra-personal levels, they are enfolded in social and cultural patterns, which in turn impact on the grander systems. (p. 178)

3.3 Educational Motivation (Not Religious Fervor)

The Forum was described by Lockwood as highly emotional, inclusive of Eastern spiritual practices and resulting in Durkheimian notions of religious effervescence (pp. 235-238). Enthusiasm for learning, deemed to be religious and arising from the "medium of experience," was mistakenly described as a means for Forum participants to be unified with "their God" (p. 249). If this was the case, John Dewey (1938) would have set forth a religio-spiritual agenda in his classic text, *Experience and Education*, still a staple of teacher education programs across the country.

3.3.1 Highly emotional.

A gross misunderstanding of transformative education was suggested by claiming educational experience “replete with stories of miracles, healings, and salvation apposite for a modern Western paradigm,” (Lockwood, p. 225) as well as disparaging descriptions of individuals who “‘share’ their personal life and relationship dramas” in what was described as a “highly emotionally charged environment” (p. 238). Both negating the value of autobiographical storying, and narrowly defining both education and religion can easily be corrected by Gottschall’s (2012) accounts of how storytelling makes individuals human, the role of emotions, and the place for emotive expression in education that has been written about for centuries.

Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey are among the educational philosophers whose ideas can provide a holistic image of the learner to substantiate the role of emotion and emotional responses in the learning process (Hansen, 2001 p. 43). Goleman wrote about the role of emotional intelligence in learning (2006) and Robinson assured that education should “invest in the intellectual development of the young person as well as the development of social and emotional competencies” (Robinson, 2011, p. 265). Herbert Kohl (1994) introduced his transformational volume by explaining the essays of reflections on his own experiences as his way of “sharing the problems and rewards of trying to do decent work in a too-often indecent society and of affirming the importance of all our stories” (p. xv). Nod Miller (as cited in West et al., 2007) who has been researching auto/biographical imagination for decades, described a focus on personal experience as a “return to long-standing concerns in sociology with self-reflexivity” (p. 167), and articulated the value – for those researching adult education and lifelong learning – “of people’s stories, with lives and selves and the sense the people make of their experience” (p. 168).

Dominice’ (2000) also made a call for storytelling in adult learning. He noted that the rationale for educational biography “pays attention to both learner empowerment through the inquiry process (an instance of the persona) and learner collaboration with educators and peers to produce, share, and interpret educational biographies (an instance of the situational)” (p. xvii). Published by the esteemed Jossey-Bass for their Higher and Adult Education Series, the audience for Dominice’s text consists of “practitioners who plan and conduct all types of educational programs for adults, in schools, universities, corporations, nonprofit organizations, community agencies, and other settings” (p. xix) confirming that sharing life stories and the transformational insights gained from the educational experience goes well beyond the narrow limits of religio-spirituality – making them ideal for the educational agenda of Landmark. Clearly, Davis et al. (2000) are not alone in their view of humans as “storying creatures” (p. 47).

3.3.2 Eastern spiritual practices.

Like O’Sullivan (1999), one “could first ask why Eastern traditions are not education – while a more spiritual culture than the west - wisdom is wisdom” (p. 274). However, there exist many examples of secular educational scholars and practitioners who incorporate practices that might be described as “eastern Spiritual practices (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 223). Others share O’Sullivan’s views about the need for reforming education in ways that are holistic and which potentially will impact the health of humanity and the planet - akin to the Eastern traditions of being present and mindfulness. Harvard educated, author, psychologist, and science journalist, Daniel Goleman (2013), published a critical study on the science of attention in which he discussed meditative thinking and reflection:

I hear Heidegger’s warning in terms of the erosion of an ability at the core of reflection, the capacity to sustain attention to an ongoing narrative. Deep thinking demands sustaining a focused mind. The more distracted we are, the more shallow our reflections; likewise, the shorter our reflections the more trivial they are likely to be. Heidegger, were he alive today, would be horrified if asked to tweet.” (p. 18)

The founding director of the renowned *Stress Reduction Clinic* and the *Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society* at the University of Massachusetts Medical School University Jon Kabat-Zinn (2015), offered examples of ways in which mindfulness and other practices from Eastern religious traditions are integrated in even the secular pursuit of mainstream Western medicine. These are only a few examples of the value of mindfulness practices. Whether taken from – or seen as similar to - Eastern traditions these approaches are being employed to improve student learning rather than to achieve enlightenment.

3.3.3 Religious effervescence

Effervescence is not the province of religion. For example, the delight of learning and contagious invitations of learners to others who might also learn is evident in a *You Tube* video (katdanger's channel, 2011) of a child excited about learning to ride a bicycle. A change in beliefs often commensurate with learning is also clear in the six-year-old's encouragement to others who want to ride a bike, "believe in yourself. If you believe in yourself you can do it!" Some 7,000,000 viewers to date may suggest that authentic and engaged enthusiasm about learning might be contagious.

Well-respected educational experts and public intellectuals with expertise in secular fields who contribute to current educational discourse about student motivation and engagement include Davis, et. al (2000), Mezirow (2000); and Sir Ken Robinson (2008, 2011, 2015) among many, many others. Robinson described the very experiences credited to Landmark Forum participants when advocating for waking students up to "what they have inside of themselves," through experiences in which "you're resonating with the excitement of this thing that you're experiencing when you're fully alive" (p. 3).

The description of the work of *Center for Courage & Renewal* and *The Courage to Teach Program* is also consistent with these views: "When we reconnect who we are with what we do, we approach our lives and our work with renewed passion, commitment, and integrity" (Intrator & Scribner, Eds., 2003, p. 213). Developed with Parker J. Palmer and The Fetzer Institute, the *Center* "was initially created to renew, sustain, and inspire public school teachers" (p. 213). As Kozol reminds "Those who want us to believe that teaching is a technocratic and robotic skill devoid of art or joy or beauty need to read this powerful collection. So for that matter, do we all" (Intrator & Scribner, 2003, Jacket). These and countless other teachers and scholars argued in their own ways, from respective research and professional expertise, for the educational value of engagement, collaboration, motivation, and passion.

Focusing on individuals through personal narratives and stories is also common in K-12 and higher education. What would back to school week be without stories of summer fun, for example? In *Learning From Our Lives: Using Educational Biographies with Adults*, Dominic (2000), addressed ways adult learners "deepen their understanding of their own ways of learning and of their existing knowledge" (p. xv). Although Landmark does not utilize a formal structure such as the biographical method detailed by Dominic, opportunities for sharing life narratives and stories of discovery in the Forum readily "promote self-actualization, especially when the individual recognizes his or her own transformational learning arising out of major change event in family, work, and community" (p. xvi).

3.4 Democratic Education (Not Deification of Individual and Community)

Just the titles *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* (Colby et al. 2003), *Love, Justice and Education: John Dewey and the Utopians* (Schubert, 2009), *Teaching Toward Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom* (Ayers, 2004), of texts cited herein verify that the aims of education in the 21st century include attention to the development of individuals in relationship with others to potentially transform community and culture. The notion of democratic education in engaged learning experiences has been around at least since the days of Socrates and is driving the service learning movement in K-12 and Higher Education. The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification offered by Campus Compact (Campus Compact, 2015) and the Lilly Foundation's support for Campus Compact's community engagement efforts, suggest that dynamic attention to individuals and communities is a pedagogy that is not going away anytime soon.

3.4.1 Deification of self.

While Christian theologian, Tillich was used by Lockwood to support a theological perspective, a stronger argument can be made that the development of the individual is an appropriate focus of educational experiences from birth to death (O'Sullivan, 1999, pp. 190–191). Philosophers like Martin Buber (1970) and Paulo Freire (2005) whose works are timeless texts among educational philosophers; as well as contemporary educators and scholars including Davis et al. (2000), Palmer, (1993, 1998), Palmer and Zajonc, (2010), are further examples. In Intrator and Scribner (2003), Stephen Gordon, a Massachusetts high school literacy teacher offered a frame for the definitive role of language in learning: "No language or culture should try to prevent the liberating struggle that acknowledges naming as power" (p. 160). Language and its emancipatory power are staples of educational research in various disciplines including literacy, curriculum, and assessment and not examples of self deification. In fact, the critical educational theorist Donald Macedo has built his academic career in part on the work of Paulo Freire (1987), writing about the power of "the word," in a paradigm of education that liberates individuals and communities.

Citing Purpel, the need to attend to both individuals and the relationship of individuals in community was also articulated by O'Sullivan (1999, p. 273): deification is not the aim of holistic education that attends to the individual, nor should educators "in any way try to encourage solipsism or self-indulgence. Rather they should stress the collectively human basis of our culture, regarding subjectivity and imagination not so much as channeled into self-expression but as necessary to the impulse to create a life of moral significance" (Purpel, 1989, pp. 114–115). Barker's recommendation of the David Whyte poem *Working Together*, as a reminder of "the gifts we bring to each other in education" and moments of crossing bridges between Self and other, (p. 28) is consistent with Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1970).

Educators who subscribe to this view of individuals and relationships among them in the teaching and learning environment aim for the "transparent I" (Buber, 1970) rather than seeing this way of interacting with others as religio-spiritual. Clearly, relationships of and among individuals and the community are complex. Valuing them while nurturing self-respect and community engagement is central to secular educational enterprises and sacred religious traditions - albeit with differing aims and outcomes.

3.4.2 Deification of community.

In 2008, Aga Kahn suggested that current times were a "clash of ignorance," and encouraged readers interested in a hopeful future, "to listen to one another and learn from one another," (p 128), as a means to realize democratic and pluralistic communities. Such dynamic descriptions of community are consistent with the aims and practices of education as found in the examples of educational philosophers above as well as the rich literature of educational best practice (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). Davis et al also support these complexities, clear in Landmark's perspectives on the individual and community. While identifying where a refrigerator starts and stops is not difficult, they explained much more ambiguous is where "a society or a person begins and ends" (p. 174).

From this fundamental and vibrant relationship between individual and community, education as a means to personal growth is apparent and education as a mode of social change is considered. Not only are the educational tenets of metacognitive reflection on one's experiences and community relationships situated soundly in the secular business of teaching and learning – but so too is a commitment to social change. Writing about place- and community based- education, Smith and Sobel (2010), in a section about engagement and achievement, addressed the value of both. Educational experiences in the community help students feel better about themselves" and "enhances their ability to solve problems and think critically, ideally one of the predictors of academic achievement (p. 79).

3.5 Learning Process (Not Eastern Religious Practice)

When speaking about educational reform, Robinson (2008) argued the problem is trying to meet the future by doing what was done in the past (p. 2). Indeed, teaching and learning are radically different in the 21st century than in previous paradigms – preparing students first for participation in an agrarian, and then an industrial society. Even museums, as secular institutions historically charged to preserve the past, are shifting their educational paradigms. Grandmont detailed the paradigm shift that has moved museums toward supporting social causes and "dealing with human experience" (cited in Cote' & Viel, 1995, p. 323). How teaching and learning looks in dynamic and relevant educational institutions is precisely the way participating in the Forum looks – engaged in considering past beliefs, taking action for social change, and sharing new vocabulary.

3.5.1 Altering existing belief systems.

Consistent with constructivist views of education, Landmark's courses employ a pedagogy of transformative learning. The courses offer participants an opportunity to:

critically reflect on the underlying ideas, beliefs, biases, prejudices, social and cultural embedded-ness, and taken-for-granted assumptions that constitute their worldview (model of reality) about the world, others, and themselves, and their frames of reference (mindset) relative to this subject or that subject. (DiMaggio, 2010)

Constructivist theory (Richardson, 1997) assures educators that beliefs change as learners create meaning through engagement with the material and in concert with others. Roles of personal belief in both the theory and practice of teaching and learning are topics discussed by educational scholars (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998, p. 8).

Dominice' (2000) similarly explained that as "adult learners improve their critical thinking, they are better able to recognize assumptions and make sense of the complexities of their lives" (p. 5). Clearly, the alteration of one's belief system is not the exclusive domain of religion, as it may have been in the 18th century for example. In fact, the ideas of educational scholars are used for this rebuttal to confirm that educators in the 21st century are called to engage the business of belief in myriad ways as Taylor et al. (2012), explained:

conflicts among diverse ideas in current times are exciting for adult education scholars because an opportunity is provided to find ways to help adults explore their taken-for-granted assumptions and replace them for more informed, more nuanced, and more discriminating knowledge. Because much of the ignorance is based on socialization that is inherently influenced by our cultural and spiritual perspectives of life, these perspectives are just as important in the solution to take us forward. (p. 233)

Further, the critical perspective needed to empower change, was identified in Mezirow's theory (2012, p. 59). Mezirow has also been associated with Landmark's pedagogy (DiMaggio, 2010). Landmark's course descriptions say nothing about belief systems, and religious belief is not included in the Forum's curriculum. Again, any educational experience has the potential to shape learner's beliefs. For example, like those explored in the Forum, the "beliefs" addressed in teacher preparation courses are used to consider how one might relate to another human being (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998, p. 237). As a result, teachers or future teachers see themselves in new ways. They help people renew and enjoy their own teaching and learning in which students reinvent, make and revise mental models of the world (1998, p. 15).

3.5.2 Producing transformative miracles.

Diana Chapman Walsh, president of Wellesley College, shared the poem *It is I who Must Begin*, by statesman, dissident, and playwright Vaclav Havel. Noting Havel's comments to the U.S. Congress that the "salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility," Walsh declared the work of educators to be "no less than the salvation of this world" (Intrator & Scribner, eds, 2003, p. 188). In particular, "Landmark's transformative approach to education" - clearly promoted on their webpage (2015, section 2) - is an approach to education substantiated by educational scholars such as O'Sullivan (1999); Taylor et al. (2012); and others. The description by the marketing team at Amazon.com (1996 - 2015) used to describe O'Sullivan's concept of transformative learning provides a clear context:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

Intrator and Scribner established that "[e]very classroom is a storehouse of miracles. If we keep our eyes peeled and listen with care, we can apprehend moments of mystery, beauty, and wonder. These are the moments in which we feel most alive. They are always there, waiting to be caught and savored, but without attention and presence they slip past" (2003, p. 93). And first grade teacher Jani Barker convinced earlier in the same volume that those who teach know that supporting a child deeply engaged in discovery "is something unexplainable and quite miraculous" (Intrator & Scribner, Eds., 2003, p. 28).

Well constructed educational philosophy, curriculum and pedagogy are developed as a means to transform communities. Scholars regarded as pillars of contemporary teaching and learning research and professional development hold social justice and change as primary to their missions, yet their work is not viewed as religio-spiritual (Ayers, 2004; Kohl, 1994; Mezirow, 2000; Rury 2013). Both Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1991) are among the many other examples Dominice (2000) could have used to explain that adult learning "may focus on individual efforts to achieve personal change or on collective efforts to achieve social change" (p. 7).

In sum, education by definition alters one's beliefs as new knowledge is gained and new skills developed. For some, learning can be seen as miraculous - as in the first time one succeeds at a difficult task, or remembers and applies complex information. For many, the power of education cannot be overstated. And, in all cases, learning something new involves a specific language and new vocabulary.

3.6 Summary

Clearly, personal opinions used to argue a religio-spiritual focus of the Forum fall dramatically short when measured against the scholarly research of scholarship of education in general, and the transformational education of the 21st century in particular. The chapter *A Critical Review of Research on Transformative Learning Theory, 2006 – 2010* (in Taylor et al., Eds., 2012) begins with a discussion of the constantly evolving nature of transformative learning. Of Taylor's 1997 and 2000 reviews of transformative learning scholarship, Taylor and Snyder (2012) noted:

greater recognition of context...growing appreciation for other ways of knowing... and the catalyst process... the importance of promoting group ownership, individual agency, shared experiential activities, interrelationship of critical reflection and affective learning, contextual influences, and value-laden course content and the need for time when engaged in fostering transformative learning. (p. 37)

Even the most naive reader can match these characteristics to those identified with the Forum.

A review of these inaccurate claims, consideration of the preceding definitions of sound educational constructs, and reflection on the discussion of how Landmark's approaches reflect rigorous, sound, educational scholarship – reveals three primary themes as valuable, if not essential, for education in the 21st century. The Forum is an educational experience that is a) holistic – inclusive of the various aspects of human being, b) empowering – with and for a teaching and learning community of committed and caring individuals, and c) transformative – at individual and socio-cultural levels. Landmark's course syllabus explains how their transformative learning, breakthrough methodology" (Landmark Education, 2015) works. Taylor et al. detailed the comprehensive theory, research, and practice underlying transformative teaching and learning in their definitive 2012 volume, and have done so since Taylor's first review in 1997. Table 1 offers a general comparison of the primary examples of the educational constructs addressed in Landmark's approaches with Taylors' conclusions about transformative education.

Table 1. Taylor's Transformative Education and Landmark Forum Constructs

Forum Characteristics	1997 Transformative Learning Research	2000 Transformative Learning Research	2007 Transformative Learning Research
Educational Motivation and Emotion	Growing Appreciation for Other Ways of Knowing	Interrelationship of Critical Reflection and Affective Learning	
Educational Process		Shared Experiential Activities	
Joy of learning		Value-laden Course Content	
Democratic Education - Community		Group Ownership	Role of Relationships
Democratic Education - Self		Individual Agency	
Critical and Constructivist Theory	Varied Nature of the Catalyst Process	Interrelationship of Critical Reflection and Affective Learning	Emerging Role of Difference
Autobiographical Stories and Transformation	Recognition of Context in Shaping Transformative Learning	Contextual Influences	Perspective Transformation

Given the arguments made herein, the Forum as an educational experience seems apparent although any "event of teaching in any classroom will prompt an incredible diversity of opinion and interpretation" (Davis et.al, 2000, p. 91). Rather than being limited to religio-spirituality emotional effervescence, relationships in learning communities among caring and passionate individuals, and an aim to change the world have a place in the classroom. Education theory and practice have been used to substantiate such constructs as requisite for effective teaching and learning as the words of Intrator and Scribner (2003) suggest:

Anybody who has ever been a student knows what we mean when we say we need teachers who have fire. Fire as in exuberance, vitality, and passion. Fire as in being alive for the subjects they teach, being open to and energized by the relationships they forge with their students and their colleagues. ...Most of us came to teaching with a zest for children, an ethic of service, and a mission to forge a better world through the act of teaching others. (p. xiv)

Dynamic relationships between the individual and one's community ought to be central to those educators who understand the world in and for which they are offering educational programs. Landmark's approach to transformative education aims for personal freedom and related outcomes that are consistently valued by philosophers and educators. Indeed, "[t]hrough the enlightenment and transformation offered by the Forum, participants are able to harness the power of their 'transparent I' becoming creators of endless possibilities" (McCarl et al., 2001). "The world a teacher and his or her students create in a classroom, at any level of the educational system, can become a microcosm of a larger world in which people bring to life their potential. Their educational work together can have a ripple effect into an untold number of other settings" (Hansen, 2001, p. 67). In sum, Landmarks' transformative approach to education has great potential for dynamically educating human beings and in turn impacting the world they share.

4. Conclusion

Landmark's transformative education, curriculum, and instructional approaches belong unquestionably in the field of education and assertions to the contrary, of religion and arguments used to support them, fall far short of the standards academic rigor requires. Like Buber (1970) it would seem that those who develop and deliver the Forum, strive for relationships with others that transcend objectification, commodification, and other power relationships with and among human beings. Like the many other classic and contemporary scholars of education cited above, it would seem that Landmark has a strong commitment to the individual and social transformation that is only possible through a holistic educational paradigm. This lifetime educator, teacher preparation professional, curriculum scholar, and social justice activist concludes that Landmark Education is a transformative model of education appropriate for 21st century challenges.

References

- Amazon (1996 – 2015). retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/The-Handbook-Transformative-Learning-Research-ebook/dp/B007T02N5E/ref=dp_kinw_strp_1
- Ayers, W. (2004). *Teaching toward freedom: Moral commitment and ethical action in the classroom*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bailey, E. (2004). Implicit Religion, in *New religions: A guide: New religions, sects and alternative spiritualities* Partridge, C., (Ed.). pp. 397-398. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ball, Sir C. (2007). Transforming your learning capabilities. *The Training Journal*. Working Paper No. 07-04. The Barbados Group. retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=995604
- Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou*. New York: Touchstone.
- Campus Compact. (2015). *Who we are/what we do/resources: Carnegie Community Engagement Classification*. Retrieved from <http://compact.org/initiatives/carnegie-community-engagement-classification/>
- Colby, A.; Ehrlich, R.; Beaumont, E.; & Stephens, L.S. (2003). *Educating citizens: Preparing America's undergraduates for lives of moral and civic responsibility*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cote', M., & Viel, A. (eds). (1995). *Museums: Where knowledge is shared*. Quebec: Canadian Museums Association.
- Davis, B., Sumara, D., & Luce-Kapler, R. (2000). *Engaging minds: Learning and teaching in a complex world*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: MacMillan.
- DiMaggio, J. (2010). *Unpublished training materials*. Provided by Landmark Education.
- Dominice', P. (2000). *Learning from our lives: Using educational biographies with adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than I.Q. 10th anniversary edition*. New York: Bantam Dell.
- Goleman, D.L. (2013). *Focus: The hidden driver of excellence*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Gottschall, J., (2012). *The storytelling animal: How stories make us human*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- Hansen, D.T. (2001). *Exploring the moral heart of teaching: Toward a teacher's creed*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University
- Heck, M.L. (October 2006). *Beyond thinking and talking: Landmark Education and the lived experience of transformation*. Presented at Bergamo, the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Annual Conference, Dayton, Ohio

- Heck, M.L. (March 2008). *Landmark education: curricular possibilities for personal and social transformation in K-12 and Higher Education*. Presented at The American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, New York, NY.
- Intrator, S.M. & Scribner, M., (Eds.). (2003). *Teaching with fire: Poetry that sustains the courage to teach*. Bainbridge Island, WA: Center for Teacher Formation.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2015). *On Being*. NPR Retrieved from <http://www.onbeing.org/program/opening-our-lives/138#sthash.dL65kaWN.dpuf>
- katdanger's channel (2011, April 19) *Thumbs up for rock and roll !!* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ealvk1cSyG8>
- Kohl, H. (1994). *"I won't learn from you" and other thoughts on creative maladjustment*. New York: The New Press.
- Landmark Education. (2015). *The Landmark Forum: How it works Landmark's breakthrough technology*. Retrieved from <http://www.landmarkworldwide.com/the-landmark-forum#howitworks>
- Leithwood, K., McAdie, P., Bascia, N., & Rodriguez, A. (2006). *Teaching for deep understanding: What educators need to know*. New York: Corwin.
- McCarl, S. R., Zaffron, S., McCarl, J. & Lewis, S. (2001). The promise of philosophy and the Landmark Forum. *Contemporary Philosophy* Vol. XXIII, no. 1 & 2 Retrieved from <http://archive.org/details/ThePromiseOfPhilosophy>
- Melton, J.G. (2004). The fate of NRMs and their detractors in twenty-first century America. In *New religious movements in the twenty-first century: Legal, political, and social challenges in a global perspective*. Lucas, P. C. & Robbins, T. (Eds.), New York: Routledge.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- O'Sullivan, E. (1999). *Transformative learning: Educational vision for the 21st century*. London: Zed Books, Ltd
- Office for Human Resource Protections (1993). *Institutional Review Board Handbook: Chapter 4 considerations of research design*. Retrieved from http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/irb/irb_chapter4.htm#f7 .
- Palmer, P.J. & Zajonc, A. (2010). *The heart of higher education: A call to renewal*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P.J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P.J. (1993). *To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.
- Purpel, D. (1989). *The moral and spiritual crisis of education: A curriculum for justice and compassion in education*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- Richardson, V., (Ed.), (1997). *Constructivist teacher education: building a world of new understandings*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Robinson, Sir, K. & Aonica, L. (2015). *Creative schools: The grassroots revolution that's transforming education*. New York: Viking.
- Robinson, Sir, K., (2011). *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative*. West Sussex: Capstone Publishing Ltd.
- Robinson, Sir, K., (2008). *Changing education paradigms*. RSAAnimate lecture. RSA, London. June 16. Transcript Retrieved from <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/videos/2010/10/rsa-animate---changing-paradigms/rsa-lecture-ken-robinson-transcript.pdf>
- Rury, J.L. (2013). *Education and social change: Contours in the history of American schooling*. New York: Routledge.
- Schubert, W.H. (2009). *Love, justice, and education: John Dewey and the utopians*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Smith, G.A., & Sobel, D. (2010). *Place – and community-based education in schools*. New York: Routledge.
- Taylor, E.W. Cranton, P., & Associates, (2012). *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- West, L., Alheit, P., Anderson, A. S., & Merrill, B. (2007). *Using biographical and life history approaches in the study of adult and lifelong learning: European perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Zemelman, S., Daniels, H. & Hyde, A. (1998). *Best practice: New standards for teaching and learning in America's schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.