

EDUCATION AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE DEVELOPING CHILD

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Author: Josette Luvmour, PhD

4330 SW Pendleton St., Portland, OR 97221

ph: 503-890-5076

e-mail: josette@LuvmourConsulting.com

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Author:

Josette Luvmour, PhD

Abstract

Awareness of the consciousness of the developing child is the focus of a new educational vision. In celebrating 60 years of holistic education expressions, this article calls for conscious learning communities that place the consciousness of the whole-child as a primary focus. While considering ideas from consciousness studies, child development, holistic education, and adult development, the author argues that nurturing the child's consciousness contributes to the adult's development as educator. The design of an emerging new learning community is reviewed as an example of a network of relationships that focus on the emergence of consciousness in children and their educators and parents with implications for society as a whole.

Keywords: emergent consciousness, holistic education, child development, adult development, relationship-based education

Holistic education is based on the notion that there is an active creative force within each person, and that this force has an intrinsic purpose and direction.

Ron Miller (2008)

As a developmentalist, consultant, and educator, I often see parents arrive in my office motivated by care and hope for something better in the education of their children. These parents know that something is not right in their child's education, yet they have no idea of how to address it. Most know that top-down transmission education is inadequate. As one father said, "So much is missing from traditional education today. I don't want my child to just pass tests in reading, writing, and arithmetic. I want something more." Another parent said, "I want certain things for my son, I just don't really know how to provide an education that will help him be who he was meant to BE...not be educated to the test." Indeed, many parents have asked me about education that nurtures the child's natural curiosity, that inspires a love of learning, and that nourishes the unique potentials of the whole-child. They just don't know how to find it or do it themselves.

To educate, we must first look at the very nature of the child. Who is the child as a unique individual, not as a part of a class or grouped with others in a grade level. Instead we must come to know the child as a person. What is the child's consciousness and how does the child's consciousness influence learning? This question must be central to any educational process—and especially to the process of holistic educators. For how can we possibly educate the child without knowing how that particular child sees the world, a seeing that is governed by the organizing principle in development? The process of learning, the acquisition of knowledge, and the very nature of perception itself are intricately linked to our own consciousness, for the lens of the *who* affects *what* is seen, and it affects the interpretation of that which is seen. For example, to be non-judgmental towards our students requires a non-judgmental attitude toward ourselves (Rogers 1969). Thus, our own development influences what we perceive. This is true for every student, and it is equally true for every educator and parent. A child's relationship with educators and parents is central to the child's perception of self and world. Who we are, as adults, is also central to our ability to teach in relationship to the child, for all education depends upon the educator.

Child Development

Why should a discussion of education begin with a discussion of child development?

Knowledge of child development is of crucial to educators because that developmental knowledge can inform educators about the optimal age for appropriate communication strategies, for relationship, and for environments that provide the best needed support for development of the child's innate capacities. A primary assumption in this view is that knowledge is emergent and that it needs context and relationship to come into being. In my own research from this perspective, I've found that a developmental stage is defined by the way the child organizes the world in each stage of life in relationship to the context using all his or her faculties (and their interrelationship): cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and self-perception (Luvmour 2006). Therefore, creating environments designed to nurture development optimizes the child's learning because building bridges between previous learning and new learning requires knowledge of the student's mental and emotional development (Caine & Caine 2011).

The field of neurobiology tells us that stages in brain development impact the child's capacity and ability for comprehension and skills. In other words, our development changes the physical structure of our brain, and different parts of the brain are ready for specific learning at different times (Bransford 2000). In addition, what changes in development is our way of knowing self and the world and our meaning-constructing (Kegan 2000). Knowledge is emergent, not constructed. Thus, knowledge of the emerging *consciousness* of the child is of primary importance to education.

What is consciousness?

Some say that to discuss the consciousness of children is too mysterious, esoteric, and incomprehensible. I attribute this mistaken impression to the fact that consciousness is not easily located because it is not an object. The locus, or space, that consciousness occupies is similar to that for all the other psychological faculties in that it is only seen in its manifestations and in its relationship to time and space. Memory and thought are other examples. They do not have a form, yet no one denies that memory or thought exists and occupies a psychological space. For memory, that space is known by its function; to recall something from former learning is to use memory. Thought is not tangible, yet thought affects everything we see, believe, and do.

Consciousness is primarily evidenced in changes in *perception*, which determines behavior, identity construction, ego development, relationship, knowledge formation, and emotional connection (Gebser 1984; Kegan 2000). Kegan argued that there is a drive in development toward complexity and the source of the drive is the nature of life itself, an intelligent energy that forms and re-forms itself...in a ceaseless, creative flow of energy in the universe. Thus, consciousness is known by its manifestations, functions, and organization of time and space (e.g., how reality is organized). Behavior, then, is the expression of the contents of consciousness. To the degree that we are self-aware is the degree to which we can make new choices in our behavior. Awareness precedes action.

In Kegan's formulation of development (2000), he contributed the idea that as we change in self-knowledge (epistemology), we learn to enter into the perspective of another, emerge out of an enmeshed state, and make new meaning in the world. Through changing our perspectives of self (subject) and the world (object), we emerge into more complex expressions. Kegan's articulation of the lifelong process of development set the stage for the idea of movement through the structures of consciousness and emergent self-knowledge as set forth by Gebser (1984), who mapped the structures of consciousness through historical representations. Gebser's theory of the origin and structure of consciousness (i.e., archaic, magic, mythic, mental, and integral) has rarely been applied to education and the practice of teaching. His view was that consciousness is emergent, and it is evidenced in representational expressions through time, e.g., language, religion, social expressions, art, architecture, and other modalities of human expression.

That said, what's all this got to do with the consciousness of children? As educators, we are working with the consciousness of our students every day (consciously or unconsciously on our parts). Neville applied Gebser's theory of consciousness to education and called for more effective teaching practices and better classroom environments. Neville (1999, 14-15) asks for educators to take seriously the multilevel awareness of the student by facilitating the integration of all the capacities of the child—intellectual, imaginative, emotional, physical, and relational. He said,

Effective teaching will call on the capacities of the archaic structure (e.g., through behavior modification, on the one hand, and trance, on the other), of the magic structure (e.g., through ritual, incantation, and specific magic techniques

such as those developed in Suggestopedia or neurolinguistic programming), of the mythical structure (e.g., through imaginal, dramatic, and narrative techniques), and of the mental structure (e.g., through logically sequenced presentation and problem solving), of the integral structure (through the celebration of difference in persons and perspectives). We can also argue that efficient myth and magic in the school setting is only possible where the child's magic/mythic need for group identity and empathic relationship is adequately met....

Neville argued that curriculum designed for the good of the world must attend to the unfolding process of the developing child and pay attention to the changes in children's consciousness.

Organizing Principle

One common idea of these researchers is that there is an organizing principle at work in each stage of childhood that guides the child to access (and actualize) innate capacities and, ultimately, his or her true nature (Jung 1964; Maslow 1971). All innate capacities unfold in sequence and in relationship with others. As a co-creator of the Natural Learning Relationships (NLR) approach to whole-child development, Ba Luvmour and I have furthered earlier understandings of child development and of the organizing principle in human development (Appendix A). In the NLR view, the organizing principle is a life force that determines the general ways in which human energy, capacities, inclinations, and interaction are structured and the ways in which human beings act. The purpose and goal of each organizing principle is optimal well-being—and it determines the way in which the social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual capacities are accessed by the child (Luvmour 2006; Luvmour and Luvmour 1993). The organizing principle is the lens through which the child sees the world—and the current expression of the child's consciousness.

In each age of childhood, the organizing principle is directing all energy toward developing full access to innate capacities. These capacities require nurturing from the primary caregivers in the child's environment to fully actualize. Each organizing principle operates best in specific nurturing environments to bring forth optimal well-being. If the educator is not aware of what is organizing in the consciousness of a student, how can he or she guide that child's learning? All students can comprehend more effectively when their unique individual talents, abilities, and capacities are recognized and engaged (Caine & Caine 2011). By recognizing what

is developing in the child, a good educator has a way to understand and reflect on ways to supply that child's developmental needs to create optimal learning environments. Educators who pay attention to these developmental changes in their students' consciousness have the best opportunity to be a master of connection by seeing through the children's eyes and feeling into the children's hearts.

Table 1: Natural Learning Relationships: Consciousness of the Developing Child

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Relationship with the Child

As our research has shown, development occurs in relationship (Luvmour 2006; Luvmour 2010a). It is well established that the relationship with attuned educators and parents determines behavioral and mental well-being in children. *Attunement* is when one person (such as a parent or teacher) focuses attention on the internal world of another (such as a child) (Siegel 2007). Another way of talking about focusing attention on the internal world of the child is called *resonance* in which we create a relationship of mutual understanding and trust with a child.

We now know through research in interpersonal neurobiology that relationships shape the developing brain (Siegel 2008). We also know that the right input at the right time throughout a child's developmental years helps the brain develop securely and normally. It's all about relationship. Experience orchestrates what gets activated from genetics in the ongoing adaptive shaping of our neural systems. In this way, experience creates the actual hardwiring of our brains throughout childhood as we develop, learn, and grow.

In my practice, I am often asked how we can educate children in a way that allows for their special talents and capabilities to be actualized. The most important thing in education is the educator's relationship (including parents and all professional caregivers) to the child's developmental moment and the organizing principle. Education is essentially about developing the child's capacities to full potential. An educational relationship that encourages the child to

access and express the fullness of his or her being is what is called for. We should not settle for anything less.

Interpersonal relationship is the center of learning for both child and adult. Mutually respectful relationships between us and our students create the context in which inspiration can emerge, and those relationships form the basis for successful learning. This calls for a movement forward in education that focuses on the consciousness of the child instead of on educating children to pass standardized tests or government norms. Educational communities of consciousness can create environments that nurture the child's innate capacities that are organizing in each age of development. All other learning should revolve around this. In this view, education can only be about the child's self-knowledge at each stage of development in relationship with those who are willing to engage the dance of mutual development.

Educating the whole child

Education involves how the child is exposed to the process of learning, which is central to the consciousness of the learner. Entering the child's worldview needs to be central to any educational process that claims to focus on the child because the child is the perceiver, the meaning-maker, the knowledge creator, and the learner. It is within the consciousness of the child that the learning occurs. Engaging the learning in developmentally appropriate communication creates an environment in which educator has resonance with the student.

A person's freedom of learning is part of his freedom of thought...If we take from someone his right to decide what he will be curious about, we destroy his freedom of thought. We say, in effect, you must think not about what interests and concerns you, but about what interests and concerns us. (Holt 1974, 241)

The consciousness of the child is the heart of education? Holistic education has been evolving in America since the 1960s (Miller 1990, p. 12). Some educationists date its antecedents back through Eastern and Perennial philosophies, through the Enlightenment period (e.g., Rousseau, Froebel), American transcendentalists (Emerson, Thoreau), Humanists (Maslow, Rogers), the progressive educators (Dewey, Parker), to the present. Educational facilities that focus on self-directed learning and experiential learning have sprung up. The radical educators of the 1960s and 70s (e.g., J. Holt, A. S. Neill) maintained that the cornerstone of holistic education involves caring for the child's creativity and transformation through nourishing the unique

potentials of the whole child (e.g., moral, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions).

My team consulted with a small school in Oregon to negotiate culture change, which included formulating and using a common language with respect for the students' developmental capacities. The staff at the school discovered how developmental sensitivity, with its focus on well-being, is a medium in which the tension between the individual and the school organization can be used creatively. Both the administration and educators of this small school found that a common language that centered on the child's developmental well-being was *safer and more efficient, and built more trust* among the educators, parents, and staff than their old way of communicating. They discovered how to speak the same language when evaluating a student's academic progress, establishing boundaries with students, and resolving conflict. Through a process of culture change, everyone learned how to engage in the interpersonal relationship of guiding the child within an atmosphere of mutual respect by using respectful (age/developmental stage-appropriate) communication. The result was student success from a high level of support that incorporated individualized education, including developmentally appropriate relationships and experiential learning vs. memorization for state tests.

This small school discovered how education and developmental support can dovetail within overlapping contexts of family, education, and community. This combination elevates the child's potential to become who he or she is meant to be. Education that is for the optimal development of the whole person serves the whole community.

The Educator:

Who we are (our consciousness) is what we teach

Education can be transformed only by transforming the educator.

(Krishnamurti 1981)

Since the child's consciousness develops in relationship with others, it is incumbent upon the educator to take great care to gain knowledge about the child's worldview. Moreover, who we are in our own consciousness strongly affects our students...and is the underpinning of all that we do with them. Because who we are is what we teach.

Jess, an educator I interviewed, reported how a conscious relationship with her student broke her heart open to greater presence in the moment. Jess discovered that the more she made intentional efforts to stay in relationship with the child's consciousness, the more she could take responsibility and not project her own feelings onto the child. In the following account, Jess describes feelings of inspiration that shifted the course of her teaching practices as well as her adult development in a way that made her life more meaningful:

I had an experience just recently with one of my students in third grade, quite bright, but she didn't learn to read and write early on. She is my student and no matter what I said to her, she said, "Oh no, I'm going to do it this way." One day I had a reaction to something she said and so I said "You really don't take my ideas very often, and I have a hard time with that." She started to cry. I reflected and then I realized that my reaction has nothing to do with this child. I am having a reaction because...I feel insecure or irritated when people don't take my ideas. That's my problem. That's not the child's problem. And it was a revealing moment for me. I didn't try to pretend that this child was the problem. It was inspiring to me...I could have made it look like the child hurt me—and I didn't. I hope that I continue to have the wherewithal to take responsibility and not blame the child.

Being-to-being learning occurs as the child absorbs our way of being through our presence, language, attitude, behaviors, aesthetics of dress, arrangement of the environment, time management, and methods of educating. It is not a verbal teaching, yet language is an indication of who we are (our consciousness). We cannot speak beyond the limits of our own consciousness. The educator's full *presence* affects our students' learning. Presence requires that we take responsibility to further our own development as adults similar to the way Jess did. The teacher cannot bring about in the child what he or she has not brought about in himself or herself.

How can we create environments for children so they can have direct experiences of their innate capacities? Educators who take the time to learn and use child development and who are willing to be present are able to create learning environments that help the children to discover and construct new ways of understanding themselves and their world. We are not top-down instructors delivering knowledge; we are facilitators who create circumstances by which knowledge emerges in the child.

Teacher Development

All education depends upon the educator. The best teachers emphasize relationship, not management. Although adults always have the power to coerce children, true caring for the nature of the child requires trust (Miller 1990). Authenticity of the educator means the willingness to question himself or herself and move beyond control or management into genuine relationship. Dillon (2002) offered a great example from his research about a teacher who heard the voice of her own parents coming through as she spoke down to her students. With self-questioning and a willingness to be authentic in the moment with her students, this educator moved beyond control into conscious relationship. She said:

Last year we had this day where the kids can bring into school music they like and talk about why they like it. Most of them brought all of this “gansta rap” stuff. I just did not appreciate it very much. It was offensive. I got all over them about it. I was like; you kids don’t know what good music is. Motown, now that’s good music. While I was saying this I thought, oh my God, I sound just like an old person, and I’m only 29! This was exactly what my parents would say to me when I listened to my music. In that moment I sort of saw myself in them and I felt very close to them. They helped me think of myself as a kid again and not a crusty old parent. (p. 271)

The role of each educator is as facilitator, guide, or counselor as proposed by Rogers (1969) and Montessori (1995). Teachers need to be deeply interested in each student. Support for the child's developmental well-being must involve re-education of each teacher to the child's developmental needs. Educators who see themselves as learners who work with the whole-child—body, mind, and spirit—are of great value to the society. Engaging in serious professional development must be regarded as essential to keeping our teaching practice fresh, alive, current, and relevant to our students.

It's always about relationship

Research has uncovered that teachers and parents who nurture the child's developmental needs simultaneously develop as adults (Dillon 2002; Luvmour 2010a). Individual choice coupled with planned action to learn something new and practice it leads to positive adult development. We know that adult change involves a re-evaluation of priorities and then a rearrangement of those priorities (Brandtstädter & Lerner 1999).

Adult Development

Adults develop throughout life. As we grow, we can develop new perspectives on life and new ways of being. Everyone accepts that the adult influences the child, but few realize how much the child changes the adult. Being in relationship with the child's developmental markers often brings a parent or educator face to face with understanding his or her own unresolved childhood issues, such as Dillon's teacher observed about herself above.

There is a body of literature demonstrating the role of the child in adult development (Demick 2011; Dillon 2002; Luvmour 2010b). Research demonstrates that children play a large and often underappreciated role in adult development and family development (Dillon 2002). For example, my research has shown that as adults interact with children and make intentional effort to nurture development, these adults become more cognitively flexible, shift their values, increase in self-knowledge, make new-meaning of self and world, increase in well-being, and develop spiritual qualities such as gratitude, presence, authenticity, and wisdom (Luvmour 2010b).

Because meaning is formed in relationships, sustained effort to be in relationship to the child's developmental moment allows the parent or educator to access greater trust, to engage in the process of self-inquiry, and to make new meaning throughout life. My research has demonstrated that caring for the child's developmental markers promotes optimal well-being in the child while simultaneously benefitting the adult's development of well-being and wisdom (Luvmour, 2010a).

Children are always telling us what is happening for them and what they need through their actions, behaviors, and ability to use language. It is incumbent upon the adult to understand the child's developmental language and communication abilities. With the right developmental information offered in the right time and in a way that matches the child's consciousness, educators can nurture the organizing principle in the child

A call for a new educational approach

Historians have identified the origins of traditional education as a set of ideals inherited from the beginning of the industrial age (Miller 1990). Today's challenge isn't about making broken educational organizations slightly better; it's about building better educational

organizations in the first place (Haque 2011). Using the principles discussed in this article, relationship-based holistic education calls for an educational environment that nurtures the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development of students with active participation from their families.

Education must provide many opportunities for the emergence of self-knowledge (Luvmour, 2017). To be truly effective as educators and parents (and anyone who interacts with children) we must have access to practical and easy to understand knowledge of the consciousness of the developing child. This knowledge deepens self-knowledge and influences behavior, ego development, relationship, knowledge formation and emotional connection in both adult and child. Following the principles and practices of relationship-based holistic education is key to creating opportunities for the emergence of self-knowledge at every age and stage of growth. The goal is each child sustained by a network of relationships that nurtures the organization of the child's innate capacities.

Summary

In celebrating over 60 years of holistic education, it is time for education that supports each child in a web of relationships with educators and parents who share in the primacy of supporting that child's development. In this view, the boundary between *adult and child* does not exist. Our relationship with the children in our care, whether personal or professional, is of critical importance to well-being in the child's consciousness. During each age of childhood, connection, understanding, and appreciation of child development are required.

Children learn competence in their developmental capacities in informal interactions with educators and in the family environment during everyday activities. To make those interactions the best they can be, it is important to understand how the child sees the world, a seeing that is governed by the organizing principle, and to nurture that child's developmental needs. Every aspect of a human being is continually adapting to relationships, interpersonal communication, and educational experiences. With knowledge of child development and attention to attuned relationships with the child's consciousness, we can co-create educational environments with supportive relationships that match the child's developmental capacities. Well-being will flourish in both child and adult. Any adult who is motivated by care in relationship with a child can learn

how to nurture the child's developmental needs (Luvmour 2010a; 2010b). Indeed, anyone can learn child development principles and nurture the organizing principle inherent in the child. The benefits of right relationships with children nourish children, adults, families, and society as a whole.

Josette Luvmour, PhD

Josette is an educator, writer, developmental consultant, and public speaker who specializes in childhood development, mutual development between child and adult and its effect on adult development, nurturing optimal well-being in the family system, transformational learning, adult learning and development, relationship-based and holistic education, teacher professional development. Her services are available at Luvmour Consulting, LLC (www.luvmourconsulting.com). Josette has been educating adults since 1992 and has published five eBooks and six print books, including *Grow Together*, *Parenting as a path to well-being, wisdom, and joy*, as well as articles that focus on relationships with children. *Grow Together* has earned the Mom's Choice Award.

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TABLE 1: *Natural Learning Relationships: Consciousness of the Developing Child*

YEARS OF AGE	PRIMARY ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE	SECONDARY ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE	CHILD’S WORLDVIEW CONSCIOUSNESS	SIGNS OF WELL-BEING
Birth thru 7	Rightful Place	Boundaries & Strength	Conscious of whole-body as environment explorations that bring feedback of pleasant or unpleasant sensations. Information from sensory-based explorations helps the child to make mental/emotional maps of self and the world, which are then used to navigate reality. <i>I belong when I sense I am connected.</i> Sensory expressions are my language.	I know I am loved, wanted, and cared for. I feel secure in my family and connected. I know my boundaries and can explore my world safely.
8 thru 12	Trust	Reciprocal Cooperation	Conscious of wider spectrum of feelings and emotions. Awareness of personal mortality opens the heart to the value and importance of relationship. Positive feeling relationships engender trust and provide information about identifying and navigating emotions. <i>I feel self in trust-relationships with others.</i> Communication about feeling relationships is valued.	I trust my own goodness so I can make mistakes and learn. I trust myself and those around me to be honest and caring about feelings. I engage and cooperate with people.
13 thru 18	Autonomy	Individuation, Identity & Personal Power, Freedom	Conscious of growing autonomy with a new ability to create identity to meet social relationships. Increasingly aware of personal ideals that are then projected onto others and the world. Self-conscious yet pushing towards freedom that will help the child uncover his or her core nature. <i>I think and have agency.</i> Responds to communication that inquires into his or her ideals. Gravitates toward those who will co-create limits with safe social explorations.	I can self-govern and make healthy choices. I have organized an identity that can express my ideals. I can navigate a wide variety of social environments confidently. I am resilient and can be responsible with freedom.
19 thru 23	Interconnectedness, Humor, Humility	Intentionality, Incisiveness, Relationship, & Systems Creation	Conscious of self as interconnected and global with a broad time sense—expanding over past, present, and future. Aware that relationships are interconnected so prioritizes formation of substantive values. New ability emerges to review the past and construct a self into project into the desired future. Integrity is <i>presence</i> in the moment with interconnected unity between subject and object. <i>I am present, dynamic, and seek those who will assist my construction of meaning.</i> I engage in dialogue with others to explore hypothetical perspectives and play.	I have a sense of enduring values. My life has purpose, meaning, and direction. I understand my past and can act in the present to create the future I want. I commit. I can communicate with others and make meaning together to create a better social world.

More about Natural Learning Relationships

Natural Learning Relationships (NLR) is a whole-child appreciation of child development with practical applications focusing on optimal well-being. Natural Learning Relationships is an ontological epistemology drawing on the work of developmental psychologists, including the emergent developmental contextual view as described by Lerner (2002) that humans are dynamic systems with a biological unfolding in a constant feedback loop with the environment. In this view, a developmental stage is defined by the way a child organizes the world in each stage of life in relationship to context using all faculties and their interrelationship: cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and self-perception. Thus, knowledge is emergent. Central to NLR is the view that unresolved childhood issues in the parent can be resolved and integrated in the context of parenting. In NLR, with the resolution of childhood issues, adults develop innate capacities of well-being and more loving relationships. What is more, wisdom emerges when adults take action to nurture the child's developmental needs. This comprehensive, thoroughly researched developmental approach has practical applications for parents, educators, counselors, and anyone in a caretaking relationship with children.



