

**TRIGLAV CIRCLE****NOTES ON THE GATHERING OF 16-17 NOVEMBER 2001  
( 100 Acres Retreat Centre, New Boston, New-Hampshire)****Education and the Ethical and Spiritual Dimension of Life in Society**

Originally planned to take place in Denmark, the country where the Social Summit was convened and which has a rich tradition of social democracy and reformist interest in education, this meeting of the Circle was held in the retreat centre of a catholic college of New-Hampshire, a state whose motto is "Live Free or Die", whose schools are locally financed by property taxes, and whose colleges and universities are part of this American learning institutions that attract students and professors from around the world. Yet this same country, the United States, apart from being absent from Unesco since more than two decades, has severe problems with his public primary and secondary schools and is worried about the general level of education of its population.

Added to this contrasted picture was the usual diversity of the participants in these gatherings of the Triglav Circle. The stage was therefore set for an animated debate that these Notes can only partially reflect.

Much was said, throughout the meeting, on the *ROLE and PURPOSE of EDUCATION*.

The etymological sense of education is "to lead out". To educate is, in early childhood, to lead from the "pleasure principle" to the "reality principle". The first three years of life are the most important for the education and future personality of the human being. Crucial is the trust that the infant must feel and experience with the mother. The infant, through this relation with the mother, tries independence and autonomy. The eyes of the mother convey the message that it is safe for the child to enter the world. That the reality is not threatening. This first experience has a great influence on the development of the brain. A "fractured" self cannot develop a sense of autonomy and then poor and sometimes harmful "substitutes: are found. For instance the fanatical devotion to a cause. After the mother, the teacher can provide the continuity and the security that the child so much needs.

This view of early education led to exchanges on the notions of security, creativity and curiosity. To the need for security is related the need for attachment, to which the modern individualistic and competitive culture does not respond well. Also, if the need for

security is so critical for the harmonious development of the child, so it must remain during the adult life. Anchors ought to be available in the midst of constant social change and demands on the individual to adjust and adapt. Where are these anchors in modern and post modern societies? Selfishness is a destructive alternative to the security provided by selfless attachments. Only social relationships, which are constantly evolving, create the basic security of the individual. It was argued that excessive preoccupation with material goods and comfort, as well as excessive competitive spirit, are sources of insecurity. The dominant economic system is based on insecurity. If the school main mission is to prepare the young for this system, the school itself contributes to the currently pervasive feeling of insecurity.

We exercise our freedom through our creativity. But is not creativity, at least artistic creativity, often the product of a fractured self? "Fractures" help to define who we are. Creativity is not a permanent and peaceful state of mind. But there is a romantic streak in these observations. The Western culture is rather sympathetic to the tormented poet or the anguished and self destructive painter. Perhaps uniquely so. Creativity and harmony with the self, the Other and the world ( the concentric circles of Confucianism) go together in the Eastern culture. Such harmony is a conquest. A patient journey towards wisdom. There is little evidence that the teaching and apprenticeship of this wisdom is still prevalent in schools throughout the world.

In any case there is no doubt that creativity requires curiosity. Teachers must inspire the desire for curiosity. Students need to be able to acquire the power of reasoning, to collect facts, to organize them, and to conceptualise. It was stressed that the cultivation of knowledge was a, if not the main purpose of education. Every child and young person has to be taught that the quest for knowledge is a fundamental part of human nature and a central component of human dignity. Education must integrate the right and the duty to knowledge as a foundation of personal growth and also as a requirement for responsible citizenship. This is to say and proclaim very loudly that education is not merely the training of workers and managers who will eventually enter the "labour market". A point to which we shall return.

Education is about the development of the personality of an individual. It has to respect and foster the uniqueness, autonomy, self reliance and independence of each. This sort of education is a condition for the emergence and maintenance of well functioning democratic institutions. With three qualifications, however.

The good use of autonomy and freedom has also to be taught. It demands a recognition of the freedom of the Other and a difficult learning of one's limit. The capacity for self examination and self criticism is the antidote to self reliance turning into arrogance and egotism.

Secondly, the teaching of capacity for individual autonomy implies the teaching of tolerance and acceptance of cultural pluralism. The recognition of the diversity of human experience and culture, and of the legitimacy and richness and beauty of such diversity is always difficult. It is perhaps especially difficult in a closed culture and also in a culture

which is apparently open, but successful, attractive and replete with strong certainties on its universal virtues. Hence the critical importance of a type of education insisting on the unity and diversity of the human family. And here again is the role of curiosity, for cultural diversity takes very concrete forms of social relationships. It starts with the awareness that the neighbour has a different trade, a different function and a different competence than “mine”. Understanding that functions and competences are autonomous but need each other is a form of socialization that lead to the recognition of the value of larger expressions of cultural pluralism, or diversity. The relations between the local and the global, and between different expressions of citizenship – from the local to the national and the world- have to be seen in this context. ( also in this context the difficult and usefully provocative question of the “equal value and worth of all cultures” was raised; it was raised together with the assumption that each culture has indeed depth and potential; it was further debated).

Thirdly, the insistence in education on the acquisition of individual autonomy and the exercise of freedom – which is apparently strong in the currently dominant Western culture- has to be balanced not only by the teaching of responsibilities and duties as not separable from rights, but also by the teaching that the pursuit of the common good, again from the neighbour to humanity as a whole, is necessary and legitimate. Such teaching cannot be a-historical. It was noted that the in the Confucian philosophy education, which is of supreme importance, is based on the heritage of traditions and accumulated wisdom, on respect for the past as a source of virtue and as a base for contribution to the present and to the common good.

Remarks were made on the excessive emphasis on independence of the individual in American schools. More generally, it was pointed out that the apprenticeship of freedom should be the last stage in a child’s growth. Debates on education were too focused on psychology, at the expense of education per se. Also, children should be taught that the spirit of competition applies first to oneself. “ Am I doing better than yesterday” is a more useful interrogation than “ Am I doing better than my neighbour”. Further, a person has to learn how to live, but also why to live. Education has to help human beings to find a sense of purpose in their lives. In a sense, this is to open a “spiritual path”. It can be argued that the young of the day are not offered much opportunity to adhere to an ideal while developing their critical rationality.

Is the purpose of education acquiring a profession, a “job”, or contributing to human flourishing? Obviously both, said explicitly or implicitly all participants to this gathering. But this truism had the merit to generate a number of remarks.

The value of manual work, in personal and social terms, is generally insufficiently recognized. There is, in most cultures, a certain ineptitude to live this work happily and harmoniously and to learn from it, individually and collectively. An unfortunate and unnecessary gap between “ manual culture” and formal education has thus being created. It should be bridged. Self esteem and sense of ownership of one trade are partly related to social recognition of different contributions to society.



Higher education has a “social service function”. It stands for personal development and cultural transmission of shared values. Universities ought to be centres for such learning instead of institutions geared only to the maintenance of a certain type of livelihood.

In the same vein, the following question was put to a group of participants: “Is the distinction between general education and training valid? And how far should such distinction go?”. Here is a summary of the answer:

- The purpose of education is to enable a child to be a full human person; The acquisition of certain virtues, for example civility, or the appetite for knowledge, should therefore transcend the distinction.
- There should be no distinction, every child should be exposed to the teaching of the same disciplines, up to the age of sixteen.
- During this period- 3-4 to 16 years old- the teaching should be both “practical” and “conceptual”, without implicit or explicit hierarchy.
- After sixteen, specialization should be progressive or rapid, depending on the capacities and tastes of the young person.

The importance for a student of a concrete involvement in voluntary work in the community in which he or she is studying was underlined.

In a related matter, a general apathy towards current events, a lack of interest for politics and the polity, for questions of society others than those touching on social mores, was noted and deplored. This remark, made by participants familiar with North American colleges and universities, was not followed up by participants from other regions. It is however related to the third part of the debate on “education and markets”.

A way of considering the role and purpose of education is to ask what ought to be the result of the education process with respect to the individuals concerned. “What is an educated person? How do you define such person? And, should public authorities intervene to help every child to become an educated person?”, were questions put to a group of participants. A summary of the answers is:

- An educated person is someone who has access to knowledge and the ability to use it.
- An educated person has an appreciation for arts, a sense of aesthetics and beauty- which has to be taught and learned- as much as a knowledge of theoretical concepts and practical skills.
- To be an educated person is never an acquired ‘state’ or “status”, requires efforts through life, but the emphasis on “permanent education” and such concepts should apply to wisdom as well as knowledge or skills and should not be taken as an alibi for neglecting the essential role of schools and universities.
- Parents and teachers have an equally important role in the shaping of an educated person. The nurturing role of the parents can simply be “passed on “ to teachers. And respect for teachers is a condition for their educating function in a large sense. In most significant civilizations the role and status of teachers was very high in the social hierarchy, notably in China. There are only remnants of this situation. Any in the West?
- Children learned by example and imitation has much as by formal teaching; they observe what adults do and develop models of behaviour; in modern societies such

“examples” come from a great variety of sources; and very diverse models are given on “what constitute an educated person”; but, again, the role of parents and teachers in setting examples should never be underestimated.

-Governments should guarantee access of all to education, provide the legal regulatory framework for educational systems, and support education by a variety of means, including financial; the principle of the state financing primary and secondary education, preferably through progressive taxation, is generally considered appropriate in most countries; views and practices as regard third level education vary considerably.

-There are also great differences of views and practices with regard to public authorities setting curriculum and determining the choice of textbooks. This approach to education is strange to a liberal anglo-saxon mind; yet, democratic countries have experienced it.

### A second focus of discussion *The TEACHING of RELIGIOUS and SPIRITUAL MATTERS*

The agenda prepared for the meeting was expressing a position in favour of the teaching in schools of moral and spiritual matters. It said in particular the following:

*“...the secular humanists, even when they place the foundation of morality in a reflection on the conditions for social harmony, come with moral prescriptions very similar to those of the deists and the adepts of natural law. It would seem therefore that only an extreme moral relativism would prevent and oppose the teaching of morals principles and prescriptions in schools throughout the world. And, ideas and traditions and customs stemming from legitimate and useful cultural diversity should also be taught. The latter are languages, modes of behavior, habits of the heart and mind that determine many of the contours of a society without altering the universal moral consciousness...”*

*And on the “spiritual”: ...Is there a complete separation between moral and spiritual teaching? Unless one reduces moral philosophy to questions of ethical codes and standards, overlaps are significant. And, is not the spiritual an essential and eminently practical dimension of life? On which grounds should children and adolescents be deprived of the discovery of this part of their being? ...But...is spiritual learning and spiritual development a purely individual and adult adventure, only facilitated and stimulated by contacts with religious institutions and spiritually inclined persons, but not amenable to teaching? Or can the spiritual be reached in institutions of learning through the teaching of arts, of beauty, of that sacred and transcendent longing for harmony that subsist in every soul, even in the most materialistic societies?”*

On the teaching of morals, which in the discussion was not clearly separated from the teaching of “how to be a good citizen” ( “instruction civique” ), various views were expressed.

Perhaps precisely because it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to separate moral education and civic education, fear of manipulation, brainwashing and indoctrination by teachers at the service of a totalitarian state or cause are real. And of course legitimate, from the standpoint of a Circle born under the umbrella of the UN Charter. When the separation is made, however, and examples of civic education in the Nordic countries

were given, no one objected explicitly to the legitimacy and usefulness of such education. The democratic character of a state – the assessment of which being a matter of both objective criteria at a particular time of history and opinion- appear to be a reasonable guarantee that civic education would not aim at manipulation but would simply be a part of knowledge useful to be an informed and reasonable citizen.

But what about the teaching, overtly or not, of patriotism? Is it legitimate in an open and democratic society? Is it possible to make a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism? Are there times in the history of a nation when the stimulation of such sentiments is permissible?

And what about the teaching of other political systems and traditions as part of civic education? A teaching of national practices and institutions can be perfectly honest and sober and yet provide young people with a truncated and biased view of the world if such teaching ignore the Other. At a times of globalization of communications, perhaps civic education should everywhere include comparative studies and exposure to different experiences. And civic education should also include the teaching of international organization, international law, and global private institutions and powers.

Nobody suggested that civic education should be left to the mass media. But is it not already the case in some countries?

The de facto teaching of civic education by the great variety of private organizations and associations of all sorts that are very active in some democratic countries was hardly discussed.

Returning to moral education, the dominant view was that it was inappropriate, dangerous and probably ineffective to have in schools and colleges specific courses on private morality. Having in a school a person responsible for ethics, a “focal point” is not necessarily bad, but better is a “mainsstreaming of ethical principles and considerations. What was important, it was suggested, was the overall atmosphere of the school, the behaviour of the teachers, the underlying moral orientations of the teaching, the existence of precise, fair, and reasonably demanding rules of conduct, and the consistent enforcement of such rules. It is neither legitimate nor possible to separate moral education from the teaching of other disciplines.

Yet it seems that secularised and liberal systems of education tend, over time, to breed moral relativism and spiritual indifference. If so, at what cost in the long term?

It was also said that certain disciplines are more amenable than others to the “moral awakening” and “moral consciousness” of children and young people. Such is particularly the case with literature and the arts in general.

At the same time it is very pedagogical, especially during adolescence, that the teaching of ethical behaviour, directly or indirectly, be done on the basis of concrete examples.



A sense of ethics and morality, not just specific rules applicable to a given situation, is necessary, and has somehow to be taught.

As for civic education, important is a comparative analysis of different set of ethical values.

It was pointed out that the prevalent ethics, the average behaviour of pupil and students was quite different in religious teaching institutions from those prevailing in secular teaching institutions.

It was said that the main purpose of moral education was to reconcile fundamental values and modernity.

There are three ways of transmitting values:

-the art of listening; this is largely lost in modern cultures; the attention span of the average person to day is quite limited.

-face to face communication, which is the real dialogue; this is also to some extent fading.

-the transmission of the cumulative wisdom of the elders, partly through the brain and partly through habits of the heart and body; this being lost with the confusion of information and wisdom.

Related is the question of authority and the question of discipline, in families, in schools and in other institutions where human beings have organized and sometimes ritualized institutions. Related also is the question of teaching, or learning through example and imitation the sense of one's responsibility. Here again we, the participants in this meeting, seem to oscillate between the observation that current education systems have gone too far- at least in the Western part of the world- in "liberating" children, pupils and students from any sort of authority and discipline, and the fear of advocating simplistic and authoritarian remedies. But the "motto" of "if you like it, do it" is also simplistic and a likely source of totalitarian "solutions".

The exercise of authority should be compatible with respect for the autonomy of the child. This exercise of authority is only valid when practised with moderation and when accepted.

The humanist discourse loses its credibility and appeal when tied with precise economic motives and interests.

The following question was put to a group of participants: "what is the desirable balance between the teaching of universal moral principles and the teaching of the ethics of the community to which the pupil belong?" Brief summary of the answers:

-moral universal principles should not be reduced to the least common denominator, or to a by product of the currently dominant culture.

-an effort has to be made to understand universal moral principles and to treat them as sources of concrete actions.

- every culture is unique and can and should make a contribution to common values.
- but the universal has to be reached through the best of each culture.
- it is important to teach well the teachers.
- it is first of all critical to learn about and from other cultures. This another tribute to the critical importance of curiosity, and of its development.

The Universal Declaration for Human Rights was seen as a common basis from which cultural diversity could be seen and encouraged.

And “finally”, the important point was made that the teaching and learning of empathy was to a large extent a substitute to the teaching of morality.

Little was said on education and the development on the spiritual side or potential human beings. Yes, the familiarity with arts, with beauty, to the noble facets of life could help stimulate a spiritual quest. But “teaching” spiritual matters was not recognized as a possibility. Religions, their history, their institutions, their characteristics were of course seen as normal subjects of teaching and inquiry.

The third question evoked was *EDUCATION and MARKETS*

Everything, - culture turned into entertainment, morality and ethical codes turned into investments and insurances, “spiritual”tricks, and of course education- is increasingly treated as commodities by the dominant culture. Of this there can be little dispute. Nor of the fact that this perception of society and of what constitutes a good and desirable life was spreading throughout the world. The decisive role of the media in this regard was once again noted, deplored and denounced. The information society has numerous negative effects. It imposes standards of industrial productivity on schools. It transmits information to the young without teaching them how to acquire knowledge, without, in particular, teaching them how to question what they see and hear. Passive attitudes, making the young vulnerable to all sorts of solicitations from the “market”, are the result of this pervasive influence of the media. Noted also was the fact that Internet has not, -not yet?- promoted more equality but rather a “digital divide”. ( can it be considered a progress that the recent UN Millennium Declaration ignores income inequalities and makes much of this “digital divide”?)

The WTO, which means the United States assisted by a few other “developed countries” is proposing to treat education as a commodity to be subjected to the same “trade and investment rules” tan other “services” and “cultural goods”. This means, for instance, that a country would not be allowed any more to give public subsidies to its universities because it would distort the “competition” to “attract students”. And, in the same logic, the corporate global class is discovering that education is an “enormous” and “promising market” with substantial prospects for good “returns” on investment.

Pertinent questions are: who will have the determination and capacity to oppose this “trend”? And first of all, do we see this as an “unavoidable” and logical aspect of



globalization, or as a political move related to very specific and identifiable actors and which therefore can be fought against with other political means? Is there in the US and in international organizations a democratic debate on this question?

The same market culture looks at teachers as second class citizens and remunerate them accordingly. They are part of the “labour force”.

Professors are traded among competing universities.

Universities are fragmented into various courses and departments.

Presidents of universities tend to become “fund raisers”.

Students tend to see themselves as consumers of the services that schools and universities provide. “I am paying a lot of money, therefore I can expect a product that satisfies me, i.e. that is “marketable”.

The following question was put to a group of participants: How can education make the market economy better and more humane?

-to teach and educate is also to understand the “market” as a social institution with a history, with rules, and with characteristics than can vary in time, space, and of course quality.

-the market has to be “put into his proper place”...

-travel, exposure to other cultures helps.

-responsibility, civility, a sense of justice are important subjects of teaching and learning.

-it should be repeated that those with the more power have also a bigger responsibility and more obligations.

-it should be taught, starting in primary schools, that many aspects of life and society should be left outside the logic and constraints of markets.

Another question to a group of participants was formulated as follows: Is there a correlation between level of investment in educational institutions and the quality of education that comes out of them?

-resources are needed for a variety of purposes including interactions among professors, meetings, travel, and in general for increasing the status of the teaching profession.

-a high or low ratio between teachers and students makes a difference.

-the public school system, in the US, has more hidden costs than private and parochial schools which can select their students.

-often again in the US, too much resources are put into high- tech. materials for teaching; this tends to deter reflective thinking.

-the opinion was expressed that the correlation is often negative...

Participants were given a quote from an article written Samuel Hazo, professor at Duquesne University, in the Pittsburg Post-Gazette: “...the goal of graduating free men and women (intellectually free) has been replaced by giving degrees to instantly employable trainees... Nothing is wrong with it if you believe that it is quite acceptable

to graduate instant earners who can't write, who can't understand and feel no need to understand history..."

And Condorcet, two centuries earlier: "...children should learn to analyse, acquire, and understand the limits of moral ideas, rather than simply learning how the ideas are defined; the man and the philosopher should not be in some sense two separate beings, each with a different language, different ideas, and even different opinions."