

What's Love Got To Do With Transformative Education?

By June Gorman, Transformative Education Forum

Abstract: Too much of education, especially following the Western Enlightenment model and its increased use of scientific, quantifiable metrics, has seemed to completely forget that love and emotional intelligence *have everything to do with* what and how well the human child learns. In a globalizing society facing shared environmental and social crises of existential proportions, this forgotten understanding is fatal to real hopes of education for sustainability and healthy human and planetary life. Love is simply too critical an emotion to understand and incorporate into education, and it has been too long left out in the cold. But cold it has been for the human mind focusing on only rational/objective and emotion-denying forms of learning and intelligence, creating minds unmoved by the thus un-felt facts of an increasingly globally warming and more confused world.

The international Transformative Education Forum founded in Geneva in 2010 addressed this very issue of what a new pedagogy of human care, ethics and spirituality – the pedagogy of human love – would actually look like in any single community and in an increasingly interconnected, diverse world. This gathered group from five continents and all walks of life, especially educational practitioners, worked to address this lack of cohesive human problem solving resulting from fragmented disciplines of outdated thinking that had led to increasingly measurable harmful human and planetary outcomes. From Geneva, Switzerland to Monterey, California, to Bangalore, India to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and the UN Conference on Sustainable Development “Rio + 20” itself, TEF educators and policy thinkers came together to address a new pedagogy reaffirming love and the necessary emotional and social intelligences that define it. Together they developed twelve Principles of Transformative Education and gathered and created models of these Principles, that are critical to re-defining exactly what that kind of love would necessarily have to do with transforming these old paradigms of educational dysfunction into a caring, thriving world.

Love, Loving Learning, Loving Pedagogy, Caring Classrooms, Emotional and Social Intelligence, Transformative Education, TEF

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“What’s Love Got to Do With Transformative Education?”

The simple fact is that if we, as a species, cannot teach our children and progeny love, if instead of the emotional and social intelligences that word “love” actually represents we continue to teach the emotional “stupidity” diseases of sexism, racism, homophobia, egotism, elitism, greed, rampant nationalism and numerous other emotional and mental diseases that perpetuate hate, inequity, injustice and human dysfunction in our world, it really won’t matter how “smart” we make our machines or how much like our smart machines, we make our children. Our planet will die to us as we will die on it, together. We will die condemned as a species to having never achieved the most critical brain jump in our own intelligence necessary to all sustainability: the one which tells us we must learn to love one another, truly learn to love our own shared humanity in far healthier ways that explicitly manifest in the world around us as our most important metric of that shared health, and in so doing preserve life on this planet for all.¹

And what’s this love got to do with Transformative Education? Transformative Education as we defined it together in Geneva in 2010, is a form of education that argues for the most important transformation of that learning from dysfunction, pain and inherited hurts to our far more natural birthright – the innate love of learning about ourselves, those around us and life including matter in all its forms, that every single human child was born with innately more than any other species on the planet.² That would mean a loving and a learning that reinforced the inner known sanctity of all life and matter in its interwoven complexity -- the cup you drink your water from, the hole in the ground that the water springs from, the water itself and all the seen and unseen elements that make and fundamentally contribute to the clear tapestry of that life.

The human child is born innate with a desire not only to love learning but an even deeper need to learn healthy loving to continue that love of lifelong learning so necessary now to all sustainable survival. The two are interchangeably intertwined in any understanding of how and why, the human child *always* learns – and learns incredibly well -- everything that is around her or him.³ This is true unfortunately of all available learning, even the imbibed education of prejudice, hate, arrogance and superiority and the fracturing of one’s own mind into pieces that one can no longer fit together to understand oneself and subsequently the absolutely necessary integrated loving understanding of humanness and even all species, in this interconnected universe. Which is often the very result if this teaching of “love” is not understood, modeled or taught well in the environment of that child, especially when young, when every child learns emotionally and imprints that learning more deeply than any later cognitive re-learning.⁴

For one cannot have one without the other, not brutal unfairness and inequity nor brutally exploitative relationships with our ecosystem and planet, while claiming and teaching real love. The premise of love demands the intuitive understanding that *all* are deserving of that love as a birthright, *all* – even species not our own. The planet itself, the way we treat our own home and the known interconnected ecosystems for all species’ survival, is the best test of whether we have learned and understood real love and why it is key to all existence on this planet. How we care, how we tender, how we touch and treat that very world that brought us into existence and

supports our living is in every sense itself the meaning of valued life. It is an “intelligence” that the human child is literally born with⁵, before it is so often sadly damaged and destroyed by that child’s subsequent life’s “education”.

Because if this innate desire for love and belonging and sense of loving fairness is not reinforced, developed and taught, if empathy is destroyed instead by suffering, pain, brutality, want and neglect, we literally limit the human brain. Those very parts of the brain that reinforce learning this healthy love first about oneself and then for all others, remain muted, less reinforced and neurologically less developed.⁶ This is true too if that child’s subsequent education is actually arguably a “dehumanizing” one, damaging the integration of that brain and heart by a cold, dominant focus only on the rational/scientific/linear and machine-like aspects of that mind, increasingly narrowing that definition of “intelligence” in ways that actually harm our ability to see more globally⁷ and with more complete understanding of our diverse world and each other.

That is also a kind of “damage” caused by this overly restrictive definition of ‘modern’ intelligence and learning most necessary to an increasingly predominantly technological world and we pay a clear price worldwide for that damage, risking our own survival. We will also continue to lose all the necessary diverse intelligences and ways of seeing that healthy minds and hearts create in their wake.⁸ Ultimately, we will lose each other and find that no machines, no matter how cleverly they imitate humanity and “connection”, will actually reconnect our brains and hearts to learn loving well, that which is the most important basis to learn everything else well. That alone is in us. We must thus instead learn a love that builds on that innate love of learning born in every child to truly develop all the potential, not only of each individual mind and its creative problem-solving gifts, but the natural connection to using that mind in the service of greater humanity and our shared planet. Remembering always that one is only human as a necessary inner-connected part of all humanity, and not human alone.⁹

The TEF Planning Meeting in Geneva

The Transformative Education Forum has this premise at its heart. Thus in that initial small gathering of thinkers about education from all walks of life, 5 continents and 5 religions in Geneva, Switzerland, the concept of what is most critical to teach and educate for in a world of amazing diversity facing increasingly complex existential and mostly human-made crises, swirled around the room and our small discussion groups.¹⁰ In subsequent forums the 12 TEF Principles would emerge to elucidate what was begun as the most critical understanding we made together, there in Geneva: alone, none of us could do it, not one of our religions or only moral secularism, not one of our nations, nor one single man or woman. What we understood so deeply there is that we needed each other. Across the world we had to develop better ways to learn to understand and listen to each other, to problem-solve and reduce this level of human fragmentation and emotional stupidity that all our fine universities, societies, mosques, churches and governments, even all our amazing science and technology, had not only not averted but indeed had helped to develop. Develop in such a way that actually puts us much closer to the steep edge of a worldwide unsustainability-cliff that as a human race and a species, we are now about to fall off, together. Certainly, it was now urgently past time to

think about what is truly *most* missing in such a world pedagogy of division, dysfunction, destruction and fragmentation and its resulting unsustainable economic, social and environmental dis-eases?

This was especially true as there were so many excited voices, mostly teachers of the young open and eager-learning child and scientists of the emerging human brain neuroscience, as well as dedicated practitioners of the loving-giving practice of their religions worldwide, who believed they had glimpsed a different path, a different way to raise and teach the human child from the beginning. This was a pedagogy dependent first on meeting that child's primary human needs as the essential most basic and true definition of our personal humanity, at the very least. But in addition, it necessitated creating/teaching and embodying the actual pedagogy of healthy human love that we know heals and builds rather than fragments and destroys.¹¹ And primarily, as many of us began to glimpse, it would demand a different intelligence in all of us so "educated" in a Western-based elite educational system that had refined our minds scientifically and "rationally" at the literal cost of our own hearts and inner knowing of ourselves, others, and what is true love and thus "fairness" in our world.¹²

These were the issues we had to be able to face together, considering education anew. For those of us still unconvinced of the urgency, we started with a Climate Change presentation, (Climatechangededucation.org) based on the best rational science our current educational system had itself created, only to find that science ignored in the face of the economic and political hegemony of irrational, but deeply controlling and powerful hierarchies of economic and social control. One could, on many levels, consider this presentation an encapsulation of both the amazing success (what the atmospheric scientists had understood and explained utilizing satellite probes to Venus and Mercury)¹³ and failure (how little the rest of humanity could hear *and feel* that abstracted science through the distracting noise of advertisements touting infinite need for consumerism-to-death profit motives) of that previous Western educational model.

Education needs to be about much more than it has ever been before. Thus in that small but diversity-filled room in Geneva, we explored ideas for what type(s) of education and pedagogy might transform into enlarging and building on the remaining good of our old education systems? But this necessitated being willing to call out the implicit and unexcavated destructive assumptions and hierarchies of innate worth by birth, gender, race, class, tribe, geography, types of intelligences and forms of spirituality that had historically undermined that education and instead created so much disparity, conflict and hate instead. What could this type of excavated, conscious and thus transformative education mean for any one community trying to problem solve these issues as they uniquely played out in their very community? It required, it was decided, an education of human and planetary sustainability gently and tentatively imagined differently, as diverse and inter-connected with all on the planet and thus most importantly, imagined with love.

The Transformative Education Forum Grows

That was truly the founding premise of the beginning attempt at imagining those ideas, at the first TEF Planning Meeting. From this initial meeting in 2010, the international TEF-Global spread to different key venues and host countries around the world -- to Monterey, California, USA in 2011, and again for TEF-US in California in 2012, Bangalore, India the next year and other more localized meetings and presentations such as the UN Rio + 20 conference in Rio de Janeiro, asking the same questions, trying to remember the necessary premise of doing so across differences and therefore with greater gentleness and love.

From all these meetings worldwide, with increasingly larger and different groups of participants sharing these concerns in their own communities, these Transformative Education Forums generated a series of Twelve Principles for Transformative Education for Sustainable Development. These key Principles were based in part we hoped, on the love we brought into those discussions to do so and what more specifically that kind of “love” would encompass as fundamental principles. Principles that hopefully defined that love in explicit and clear enough ways that true Transformative Education which depended on just that kind of open and vulnerable learning from all, was far more likely to occur and thus become in itself, sustainable problem-solving for healthy ways to grow and develop in any community.

But most of all, in these discussions it became clear that Transformative Education required at its base a willingness to deconstruct and examine the existing “hidden curricula” in our own, and every society, that currently interfere and work against these principles. Principles that should work instead towards an integrated whole-systems understanding that would underline a healthier, more sustainable planet and humanity explicitly based on a clearer definition of healthy human love. Thus the TEF Principles attempted to address these essential issues at the root of what would scaffold that kind of truly transforming education from what it had been historically to what it could be; retaining and high-lighting the love of learning that should form the base of all sustainable education of any kind. Subsequently, the language and wording of the 12 TEF Principles would be key and was done in consensual ways together and anonymously, then voted on by the whole in terms of all the transformative conversations that had been held interpersonally in shared space and time.

The Principles of Transformative Education

The first five Principles are core Principles of Transformative Education. The next seven Principles are more specific elements that are essential to the concepts of Transformative Education as it is practiced pedagogically. Together these 12 Principles define a system of education designed to transform older, obsolete practices and focus instead on developing conscientious global citizens with the ability to problem-solve complex issues for a more equitable world and sustainable world.

Principles at a glance:

1. Human Rights
2. Sustainability
3. The Importance of Value Systems: Morality, Ethics and Spirituality
4. Diversity
5. Economic and Social Justice/Equity
6. Peace Education and Conflict Resolution
7. Holistic Education
8. Community-Based Learning and Indigenous Wisdom
9. Simulation/Experiential Learning.
10. Incorporating New Brain Neuroscience and Skills of Critical Thinking
11. Use of Technology for Greater Connection not Alienation
12. Sanctity of Human Learning and Life

PRINCIPLES OF TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION: THE WORDS

Principle 1: Human Rights

Transformative Education shall promote and support the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to reinforce the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. A Transformative Education acknowledges the right of all people, from all nations, all races, all ages, and economic standing—in particular for girls and women in all nations, to access a Transformative Education equal to that of men.

Principle 2: Sustainability

Transformative Education shall promote and support the practice of sustainable development, meshing economic growth, respect and protection for the environment with social equity and wellbeing. Humans are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

Principle 3: The Importance of Value Systems: Morality, Ethics and Spirit

Transformative Education shall embrace the values, ethics, morality and spirit that have stood the test of time worldwide because these values recognize and honor the interconnectedness of all life. Transformative Education shall lead to a more conscientious global citizen with an emphasis

on empathy and compassion and with the understanding that science, technology, engineering and mathematics,* without the underlying values of planet and human sustainability, is devoid of meaning.

Principle 4: Diversity

Transformative Education shall promote the values of diversity, welcome cultural differences and recognize heterogeneity as a gift of strength and adaptability and the critical concept in developing any viable solutions for sustainability, in a diverse and complex world.

Principle 5: Economic and Social Justice/Equity

Transformative Education shall inform, promote and support the special situations and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, as a special priority. Transformative education should also address the interests and needs of all countries, including developed countries where poverty and racial and economic inequities still exist, and thereby contribute to the prevention and reduction of economic global inequality.

Principle 6: Peace Education and Conflict Resolution

Transformative Education shall promote and teach the tools of peaceful conflict resolution, including alternative dispute resolution, which is defined as any process or collection of processes established to resolve disputes without trial or violence.

Principle 7: Holistic Education

Transformative Education shall be holistic and aim at education of the whole person – mind, body and animating spirit, including their emotional, social, and physical development as well as valued, multiple divergent and creative/artistic intelligences important to problem-solving in a complex world.

Principle 8: Community-Based Learning and Indigenous Wisdom

Transformative Education shall be community-based and take local needs into account as well as value indigenous wisdom and their contexts while promoting service learning, including an ability to identify community needs and the skills to address them.

Principle 9: Simulation/Experiential Learning

Transformative Education shall encourage and promote the use of simulation and experiential learning programs such as Model United Nations, Model Governments and Model Corporations to build dynamism, active complex problem-solving, emotional, social and cultural intelligences and other core elements of human capacity.

Principle 10: Incorporating New Brain Neuroscience and Skills of Critical Thinking

Transformative Education shall support the inclusion, application and integration of recent educational neuroscience findings, including integrative neurophysiology and pedagogical learning theory on how the integrated brain actually learns best. Transformative Education shall promote and incorporate transformative, pedagogical practices that develop whole brain, critical thinking/feeling abilities and capacities.

Principle 11: Use of Technology for Greater Connection not Alienation*

Transformative Education shall utilize technology in a manner that does not impede but enhances the education of children and enables Transformative Education, which cannot be delivered in any other manner.

Principle 12: Sanctity of Human Learning and Life

The learning environment shall be sacred, trust in the wisdom of imagination, teach the wonder and potential of every human child, the interrelationship of life and that we can no longer afford to live with privileged disregard of this planet, all its diverse and valuable species and each other.

*Note that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are heavily promoted in U.S. educational policy. TEF-US would like to instead promote necessary exploration of arts, values, ethics, morality and sustainability that would underline any such STEM focus, include more of the Principles above and thus transform that focus to “STEM+“.

From Principles to Practice: TEF Models and Affiliates

As a result of these critical TEF Principles and of the Transformative Education envisioning that came from these global meetings, many participants wanted to form TEF Models, TEF-Chapters or TEF affiliated groups that dealt directly with their own community issues and their own diagramming and excavation of how their specific educational systems did or did not meet the essential principles that came out of TEF-Global. It was hoped that more of these TEF affiliates would come about through their own momentum and as a result of TEF-Global conferences seeding such discussion in various communities around the world. These chapters would be fairly independent, based on their own indigenous educational needs and existing constructs but guided by the TEF Principles, as a cohesive base.

The first of these, the African Sustainable Agriculture Project, came out of the initial TEF in Geneva, and thus the TEF-Monterey – by special request of the Cameroonian and other African agriculturally-focused nations – set aside significant time to focus on this specific education requested because of their local needs and desires for their own countries’ progress. This desire was situated in the dominant role of agriculture in their economies and the hope to learn more about sustainable rather than First World corporate agri-business models, to best provide for the protection of their land propelled by their own long history with and *actual love of that land*. As a result, one of the outcomes of TEF-Monterey at which over 15 African countries were represented was the creation of the African Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP). It was actually one of the reasons for locating the 2nd TEF-Global in the Monterey-Salinas California area, made famous in the novels of John Steinbeck, and a major agricultural center in central California with primary crops from arugula to strawberries. The valley also includes many farms that are leading examples of sustainable and organic agriculture. Because of the importance of agriculture to this area, especially in lettuces, the Salinas Valley is often referred to as “The Salad Bowl of the World.”

Thus TEF-Monterey included many local participants including the Mayor of Salinas, himself a leading radicchio farmer in the area, along with board members of the Central California Food Shippers and Growers. It also included the President of Hartnell College, the local community college with educational programs that also focused on the primary agricultural sector as well as its labor population as a major economic force in the area. Subsequently many honored guests came from Cameroon very interested in better agricultural models and their potentially transforming education component. These consisted of the Mayor of Cumbo, Cameroon and his delegation who had offered land for a pilot program and educational center and brought a letter from the Fon or “King” of this area of Cameroon in strong support and interest in the project. As

a result, this aspect of TEF-Monterey arranged actual field trip visits to Hartnell's new Agricultural extension site as well as working, sustainable farms in the Salinas Valley. It also included reaching out to and setting up future meetings up the road with the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) "Sustainable Farm" program, one of the first and most comprehensive sustainable and organic agricultural programs in the United States. As a result for the first stage of the Project, directly following TEF-Monterey and during the next year "AREA" or the "African Research Education Academy" was established on land donated by the Cumbo, Cameroon Mayor on behalf of his city and built by Dr. Ajume Wingo, one of the original TEF founders in Geneva.

What was discussed and envisioned in these first and subsequent meetings with UCSC, was a pilot ASAP program between AREA and UCSC's sustainable Farm summer educational program for exchange of both students and educational experts to create a connected and reciprocal stream of education that is critical in establishing truly "transformative" learning between any two or more cultures. A new company working in sustainable and organic fertilizers, "Perfect Blend,"¹⁴ also offered to partner in the ASAP model, to include the education of the renewal of soil's natural "biotic cycles" that with live and organic rather than petro-chemical fertilizers, can be re-established in soils even determined as nutritionally "dead" by all bio nutrient standards. This type of organic based fertilizer was shown to re-establish that microbe cycle and had proven to actually bring those microbes back into soil rebuilding. This is an actual "transformation" of the very land itself back to life! While this ASAP pilot project is still small and "under the radar" with initial interest and meetings continued between Cameroon, Mali and Tunisian TEF participants, it continued to literally gain ground including new interest from Nigeria and Ethiopian agricultural leaders. As a model of this very kind of transformative education based on love -- the Cameroonians love and care for their land-- it was a project I presented in specifically more educational detail at the International Education (UKFIET) conference in Oxford, September 2013, "A Transformative Education Model in Cameroon."¹⁵

But along with ASAP and from the initial two international meetings of TEF-GLOBAL, in Geneva (2010) and then Monterey, CA (2011), numerous other TEF-affiliated interdisciplinary educational projects and dreams based more on people and love of people, as well as of nature and our planet and land to better define "true sustainability", began to spring up and affiliate with the 12 Transformative Education Principles. The attraction for many of the American classroom educators gathered, was that these TEF Principles were in explicit contrast to more recent US educational reforms that seemed focused on fractured and disconnected subject matter, data sets and technological visions of increasingly privatized/corporate "standardized" models of quantitative testable learning that had been increasingly appearing in US public classrooms. Without significant input from the teachers themselves in these reform 'policies' -- there was an increasingly glaring "disconnect" that showed up in trying to actually implement these fractured "reforms" with an increasingly disjointed, over-"wired" classroom climate and little loving interaction.

As an outgrowth of this local more nationally focused interest at the Monterey meeting, a "Tef-US" affiliate was established (<http://tef-us.org>) in a follow up meeting the next year, May 2012. Tef-US focused more clearly on the needed transformation in the US from a national military-industrial focus and "narrative" (<http://nationalstrategicnarrative.org>) to a more sustainable interdisciplinary and international understanding of healthier governance and

economic systems, and the educational transformation necessary to achieve those goals. The founder of Tef-US, Susan Santone, had herself happily discovered such similar beliefs in these ideas and the TEF Principles. The same beliefs that had caused her, out of her own love and passion as a longtime teacher in Michigan and for the hope of sustainability education that actually led to better outcomes, to think in terms of Creative Change (<http://www.creativechange.net/home/>). By “Creative Change”, Susan and other educators that joined on to help, meant to develop models of actual classroom curriculum to get US education to the caring principles necessary for true sustainability in our country. And to do this by actually attempting to deconstruct the common clichés used in terms of sustainability and “innovative” education and achieve the kind of sustainability that more truly leads to, “Technologies and solutions that are evaluated based on their ability to contribute to overall wellbeing.”¹⁶

As Susan herself puts it,

"Educating for sustainability no doubt requires transforming core components of the educational system including curriculum, teacher preparation, classroom practices, and assessment. But truly changing these tangible, visible elements also requires transforming the "invisible" component: the mindsets and assumptions that drive our practice. The current educational paradigm reflects the belief that the purpose of schooling is to make students competitive in the global economy. It's a system that sorts winner from losers in the service of economic growth. We must expose this belief, challenge the harmful practices and policies it leads to, and reclaim the civic mission of schooling. Educators need to take a stand, call out the invisible beliefs, and redirect schooling to prepare students for a fulfilling life in a democratic and sustainable society. At the root of this is love, passion and commitment: love of children, passion for positive change, and a commitment to the work that will bring it about."¹⁷

But as TEF-GLOBAL had always been based on an organic and truly connected model of relationship, much like we thought of nature herself, more seeds of these initial Transformative meetings actually began to take root and flower. Native Californian Barbara Benish, returning from her many years living on and directing a “Center for Creative Sustainability” Organic farm and learning center (<http://new.artmill.eu>) in the Czech Republic and now based in coastal Santa Cruz, had become more and more concerned with marine life and plastic pollution and other ocean sustainability issues. Having worked around the world in concert with the UN Environmental Program (UNEP) and in particular the Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam ocean and chemical pollutant treaties, after attending TEF-Global, Monterey, Barbara saw new possibilities for sustainable education about these issues right on the Monterey Bay Coastal Sanctuary (<http://montereybay.noaa.gov>). From her amazingly creative and inventive take focusing particularly on the arts and sustainability, Barbara went on to develop the SS Palo Alto Project (<http://www.art-dialogue.org/projects/ss-palo-alto> and <http://arts.ucsc.edu/programs/centers/art-as-social-practice-research-rfaprojects-paloalto>). This project was envisioned to transform an actual concrete warship relic that had decomposed and surprisingly become a teeming coastal “reef” where new marine life congregated, to an arts and education project that draws in the community and the many visiting tourists to the fragile beauty of this natural area. It was a perfect transformative education example of how love of that beauty could be transformed into learning how active sustainability of that resource could save it and the oceans themselves, for all future generations. And it was based in love, as Barbara herself had

been raised on the California coast and the Pacific Ocean that she herself loved so much, that to this very day she tries to swim in it every morning, rain or shine, Summer or (California) Winter.

But this fertile connectedness is what was at the heart of “transformative” education itself. It was what had been designed, demonstrated and created by the relationships of care and communication enlightened by diverse ways of truly listening and learning from each other that explicitly had defined the TEF “pedagogy” so differently than standard, more usual models of either academic or multi-lateral international learning conferences. As Co-facilitator of TEF-Global in Monterey, Ca, Ken Gnanakan also brought this “heart understanding” and found so many parallels to the work he and many like him were doing and wanting to expand in education in India. Thus he and critical others in India stepped up to organize and host the following TEF-Global 3 in Bangalore, India the next year.

TEF-Global Goes to Bangalore, India

Again, this TEF convened with international people from all over the globe interested in these significant issues of what kind of education can meet any particular diverse community’s or society’s needs for sustainable development? These were needs that explicitly encompassed the desire for the critical human Transformative Principles that TEF arrived at by consensus of all the diverse people gathered at its two previous meetings. These were people from all walks of life – from policy makers at governmental and UN levels, to top military leaders, to citizens, parents, students and academics but most of all, and always, emphasizing the need to bring the frontline educators into the conversation themselves. This had always been a founding basis of TEF – as it came directly out of teachers’ hearts and the pain they were seeing daily increase in their classrooms with policies separated from this same “heart understanding” of the most critical learning that goes on in those classrooms: The learning to love and accept one another in all our many Technicolor raincoats of needed diversity and complex thinking and feeling.

For Dr. Gnanakan, TEF-Global Bangalore, India provided this platform to expand the work of ACTS (<http://actsgroup.org/index.php?page=home>) an academy of “integrated education” that focuses on “agriculture, crafts, trades and studies” and thus the acronym “ACTS”. ACTS is a non-profit organization that itself began in Bangalore, India committed to total development through educational, environmental and community health projects across India. One of the original participants at the initial TEF-Global founding meeting in Geneva, Dr. Gnanakan saw that, "ACTS Academy in Bangalore already modeled several of the TEF principles through its emphasis on integrated education. Not only is training offered thoroughly integrated, the model is grounded in real life so learners make a difference in their own world."

These very concepts of human equity, justice and fairness were at the very root of the “moral and values” discussion that ultimately formed one of TEF’s most foundational Principles # 3: “Transformative Education shall embrace the values, ethics, morality and spirit that have stood the test of time worldwide because these values recognize and honor the interconnectedness of all life. Transformative Education shall lead to a more conscientious global citizen with an emphasis on empathy and compassion and with the understanding that science, technology, engineering and mathematics, (STEM) * without the underlying values of planet and human sustainability, is devoid of meaning.”

This was a critical Principal related to people's universal construction of "love" and discovered because despite the relatively small number of international people gathered at that original 2010 Geneva TEF inception, they came from over 20 countries, over 5 continents (everything but Antarctica and Australia) and most importantly, more than 5 religions and multiple other forms of spiritual beliefs and mindfulness practices. It was these spiritual premises and practices that many believed embodied this moral value belief in the importance and efficacy of human love in all planetary problem-solving. And underlying that value for the people gathered to discuss transformative education, was the need to bridge the created division across these multiple ways of saying and doing love in the world, that must be demonstrated in specific outcomes for those communities and societies.

So this Principal along with the other important core TEF Principles of Human Rights specifically including Women/and girl's rights to equal education, Sustainability, Diversity and issues of Economic and Social Justice and Equity became the platform on which TEF-Bangalore, India also built and framed their increased educational goals and models to outreach further into India and the world.

“Living TEF” Projects in Process Currently Around the Globe – A “Systems” Model

Current TEF-Global projects and models and affiliations span the globe, with new “connections” forming all the time in the truly human “web of life, love and learning” that TEF defines as “loving” sustainable education. Of particular interest is TEF's recent involvement and work with the BeLonging Projects, (<http://www.thebelongingprojects.org>) essential for TEF Principals that focus on classroom climate and empowering the students from pre-school on up, to take responsibility for their own classroom management and climate. Best of all this program, currently in several schools in Mirano, Italy, frees up the teachers to focus on what they do truly love – teaching – while allowing the students' to monitor their own and others' emotional and social, as well as intellectual inclusion and comfort. This model is based on the functional architecture of the Mereon Matrix, and relates to how modern science and ancient wisdom traditions agree on a universally defined matrix of principles defined by natural forms. It argues for a distribution of naturally rotating class management roles defined by the matrix that include “Tree, Sky, Dolphin, Earth and Possibility Kids”. Its premises of sustainability come out of nature itself. As its founder Lynnclaire Dennis, describes the BeLonging Project,

“BeLonging includes in its necessary definition of education in a school system, the concept of fun as functional - as fundamental- and as the very foundation of existence that should include the concept of ‘high play’. Being loved is an invitation to belonging – loving with learning is the key to living wholly and fully.”¹⁸

Also currently, even more ideas and models have come out of recent TEF meetings in partnership with The Schumacher Institute in Bristol and gearing up for a TEF-Bristol/Bath this year, in preparation for Bristol's European Union Designation a “Green Capital” for 2015.

From the Transformative Education Forum's simple beginning at the US Mission to the UN in Geneva, Switzerland and affiliated with the University of Geneva's Social Change Forum that year in 2010 (<http://www.gfsc.ch/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2010-Program.pdf>), TEF has grown into an organic connection of various and diverse models for Education for Sustainability throughout the world. It has gathered to its green heart, those from every background and walk of life who share this premise and want to build on it with the knowledge of how much strength and learning joy it imbues into the very education model itself. This lived systems sustainability would be the key "metric", along with the earth itself, of creating that type of learning that really understands at its base how much healthy love – emotional/social and cultural intelligences combined – does indeed have to do with this transformation in our world and thus more importantly, to build that understanding in all education for actual human and planetary sustainability. That above all, the key underlying premise of that educational transformation must be based on sound, healthy, integrated and explicitly stated concepts of love that form the most basic principles of that education and that definition of love. The kind of education involving love that utilizes all our under-utilized potentials across our brain, body, hearts and spirits that can actually heal a people and an entire planet wanting desperately to learn that very pedagogy, to achieve a sustainable and even thriving, shared world.

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Me



TEF-Global, Monterey, California -- 2011



My personal photo, taken on the beach of Cancun, Mexico UN COP 2010 Conference