

# Building for the Future

## The Role of Spirituality in Creating Change in Community

Contemporary Educational Theory  
Laurie Cook (She/Her) | Nov 29, 2020



# Land Acknowledgement

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) people first signed with the British Crown in 1725.

The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

I want to acknowledge I am still learning about the treaties and histories of First Nations in this land, but I do want to do my best to contribute to moving forward together .



# What is the Purpose of this Presentation?

## The problem I want to look at is...

how to address current and historic issues around economic inequities by engaging youth more, especially those from marginalized or racialized groups, in social movements and learning that would enable them to participate more in creating inclusive economies to help all of us  
#buildbackbetter.

To do this, I'm going to take you on a journey to explore:

- the roots of adult education,
- ideas behind radical adult education,
- learning about and meeting some of the key theorists I've been digging into so far related to this work,
- and understanding more about social movement learning and the potential of holistic education.



# I think this research question is important because...

Recent research (Kishchuk, 2020; Wolff, 2020; MacDonald, 2020) is shows that youth and people from marginalized and racialized groups are being affected more dramatically than other populations.

With youth, there is also concern about the long term impact of Covid; economically and health-wise (ie. mental health impacts).

We need though to not only be looking at what youth think about Covid and their future, but also how to engage them more (since they are one of the groups with the most at stake) in social movements looking to address both current and historic issues of economic inequality.



**For me, the purpose of education (especially adult education) is about finding ways for all of us to reach our full potential as human beings, and as a community.**

**I'm not alone either...**

According to adult education theorist Eduard Lindeman (1926), as cited by Bean (2000), the purpose of adult education is to "create meaning out of life experience" (p.67).

Lindeman also believed though that the meaning gained through adult education was not complete until it was expressed through social action" (Bean, p. 67).

Social Movement Learning theorist, Holford (1995) also said adult educators have no other role so "profound" as to contribute "to the emergence of new knowledge in society, and to social change" (p. 28).



**Eduard Lindeman**

So, if there is agreement that growth as a society is one of the most important purposes of education, and especially adult education...



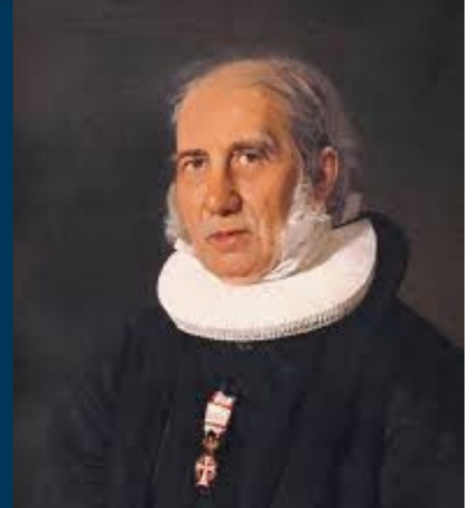
Nicolai Grundtvig  
(1783-1872), from  
Denmark

Poet, Pastor,  
Philosopher,  
Politician, Historian  
& Teacher



How do we become more intentional in creating the kind of learning opportunities that we need in society, especially among young people?

Some of the people and ideas I've been thinking about in relation to this include...



# Adult Education Theory, Grundtvig & Folk Schools

What does it mean to be  
human...



*"A good, radical education is about  
loving people first... next is respect for  
people's abilities to learn and to act and  
to shape their own lives..."*

- Horton, M. & Freire, p. (1990, p. 177)

# Paulo Freire & Critical Pedagogy

According to Cobden (1998), the roots of Freire's thinking around Conscientization are based on his understanding of Marx's theory of consciousness.

Against this backdrop, Freire's educational projects are about a critical and dialectical perception of reality.

His approach involves starting with 'where people are' but then supporting them to move to an increasingly higher level of critical consciousness.



## Giroux: Why this is important?

Henry Giroux (2010) talks about how Freire's work is more important than ever because current educational systems are "privileging job readiness above any other educational values [including] self-reflection...[and] critical agency" (p. 716).

He adds Freire's work is about "a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy" (p. 716).

# Social Movement Learning...

## John Holford

As mentioned earlier, Holford believes social movement learning is one of the most powerful categories of adult education.

He also says, "The theory of social movements, if cast in terms of sociology of knowledge, provides the basis for a radically new understanding of the relationship between adult education and the generation of knowledge" (1995, p. 95).



## Budd Hall

Hall (2006) uses a poem by Marge Piercy called The Low Road to illustrate the nature of a social movement:

What is a Social Movement?

It goes on one at a time | It starts when you care | To act, it starts when you do it again after | They said no | It starts when you say we and know what | You mean, and each | Day you mean more

Hall also says "deepening our understanding of learning within social movements is a contribution, however modest, to the achievement of the larger historic project of a world we want" (p. 231).



Citing Eyerman and Jamieson (1991), Hall notes: "There is something fundamental missing from the sociology of social movements... North American social movement theory... focuses on what movements do and how they do it, [but] not what [the] members [of various movements] think" (p.45).

This seems then like a prime opportunity to explore further what young people think about different social movements, what attracts them to different movements and what they feel they learn.



## Social Movement Learning Con't...



Also, the opportunity with Social Movement Learning is that it is not just what the 'members' of various movements are thinking but what people outside a movement are thinking too. SML includes:

- ) learning by person who are part of any social movement; and
- b) learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of the action taken or simply by the existence of social movements (as cited by Hall, B. in 2006, p. 6 including Hall and Clover, 2005, pp. 584-589)

## Going back to Grundtvig, Freire & Horton...

Horton being the founder of the Highlander Folk School... which has a long history of involvement with social justice movements.



**Myles Horton**

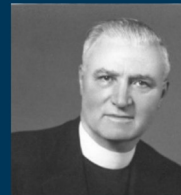
At one point in a series of conversations between Freire and Horton, they start to talk about and reflect on what drew both of them to do the work they did.

Besides their common Christian background, Horton in particular notes a memory of a young girl that he saw in the Appalachian Mountains of the U.S. and how this incident spurred his interest in the area that eventually led him to create the Highlander Folk School (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 231).



**Jimmy Tompkins**

This Christian 'spiritual' background was common to Grundtvig, Freire, Horton and even the founders of the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia in the 1930's, Father Jimmy Tompkins and his nephew, Moses Coady.



**Moses Coady**

# This 'Spiritual' Connection...

## Going back to Bean...



Wilf Bean

Bean admits that "at best, *spirituality* is a vague term encompassing a vast landscape of meaning... but there remains within us a need for meaning, for understanding how our lives fit into the larger world" (2000, p. 72).

In his work looking at the spiritual dimensions of adult learning though, Bean also asks the question: "In this time of transformation, how can adult educators and community development workers respond?" (2000, p. 72).

He goes on to outline some principles that could help to foster a more 'contemporary' spirituality that might help (2000, p. 72):

- 1) "Ecological Base. Human are not the apex of creation, but one species within a complex, interdependent web of life."
- 2) "Social Justice. The increasing global exploitation of both humans and nature is unjust."

3) "The Dignity of the Human Person; Each person is a unique 'subject,' a creator and an end in himself or herself, not an object to be used for the benefit of others."

4) "Community Based. 'I am because we are, says the African Xhosa proverb.' An individual's life is both shaped by and in turn shapes the web of relationships of which it is a part."

5) "Action for Liberation. A spirituality... is a practice of justice."

6) "Combined Action and Reflection... is relevant both for the groups with whom adult educators work and for adult educators... themselves."

# Bean finishes with...

"These spiritual principles do not stand separately.

Each is a strand in a larger, interconnected vision of a more sustainable, equitable world in which both people and resources are honored as sacred and where everyone is more fulfilled through an increased awareness of their connection and contribution to the greater food of the entire Earth community.

This is a vision in which spirituality, adult education and development are inseparable, and one that challenges adult educators... to understand their work as central to the project of human betterment" (2000, p.75).



## Sarvodaya Shramadana, Sri Lanka

Bean also recognizes spirituality and education can come in many forms around the world. In the same work where he writes about the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia, he talks about the Bhuddist Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka.



Bean describes it as emphasizing "the interconnectedness of reality. It calls for awakening on four levels: the personal, the village, the nation and the world... Achievements are not just measured in changes in social systems or economic production, but also in human transformation... with an underlying assumption [that must include] the unfolding of the villagers' potential for wisdom and compassion" (2000, p. 70).

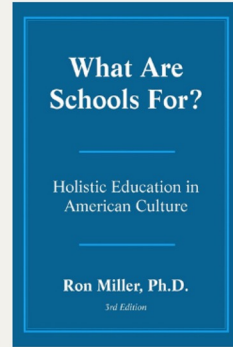
# Holistic Education

How do we involve 'meaning' & spiritual practices more in SML though...

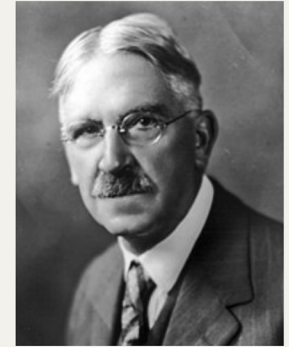
Holistic education is based on "each person finds identity, meaning and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace.

It aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning.

This is done, not through an academic 'curriculum' that condenses the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with the environment... [and by nurturing] a sense of wonder" (Miller, 2000).



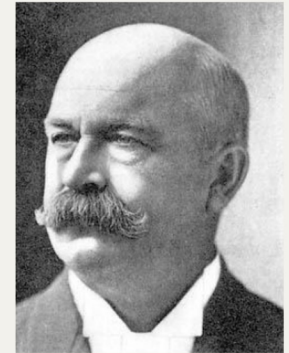
Maria Montessori



John Dewey



Rudolf Steiner



Francis Parker

# Spirituality, Consciousness & Meditative Inquiry

"We are facing a tremendous crisis; a crisis which the politicians can never solved because they are programmed to think in a particular way - nor can the scientists understand...nor the world of money. The turning point, the perceptive decision, the challenge, is not in politics, in religion... it is in our consciousness" (Krishnamurti, 1983 as cited by Kumar, 2013, p. 3).

"[C]hange in human... consciousness is necessary and [a] precondition of later political change..." (Macdonald, 1995 as cited by Kumar, 2013, p.3).

Both Krishnamurti and Macdonald believed the highest function of education "is to provide opportunities for teachers and their students to understand and transform their consciousness and thereby society" (Kumar, 2013, p.3).

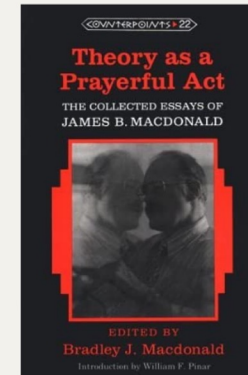
Meditative inquiry is an approach to focus on learning "about oneself and one's relationships with people, nature and ideas...[and] 'awareness' is [the] central dimension" (Kumar, 2013, p.3) of meditative inquiry.

Kumar goes on to describe four perspectives on awareness:

- information
- criticism
- reflection
- meditation



Jiddu Krishnamurti



# Spirituality & Meaning...



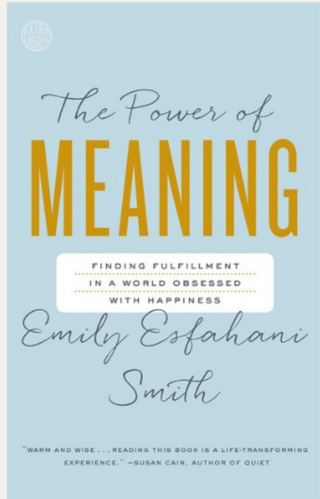
Writer Emily Esfahani (2017) says happiness comes and goes, but having meaning in life -- serving something beyond yourself and developing the best within you -- gives you something to hold onto and builds resilience.

4 Pillars of Meaning she talks about are:

- Belonging
- Purpose
- Transcendence
- Storytelling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9Trdafp83U&t=572s>

Even though, I know I know I still have a lot of learn - I believe this video is in keep with the spirit of Holistic Education. It talks about how people can have more meaning in their lives, and I think it has a critical message about the deep importance and benefit of serving others.



# So, going back to Research Purpose & Question...

Given the purpose of my research generally is to support the development of more inclusive economies, and thereby more inclusive communities; and to look at how to engage youth more in this endeavor, what I've realized is that what we've been doing is not enough.

We need to find new, more 'holistic' ways to address long-term systemic issues of racism, trauma, reconciliation and renewal. We also need to make the most of this terrible opportunity with Covid-19 to reach out to more people to help move this work forward.

But to do this, we also need a major shift in our 'collective' consciousness.

This work require a deep level of caring for other people.

I believe that holistic education, meditative inquiry and dialectical conversations about how one finds 'meaning' in one's life could be very important ways to engage youth and others in social movements working on these issues of equity and inclusion.

This is why I'm also interested in learning more about the role that 'spirituality' can play in social movement learning.

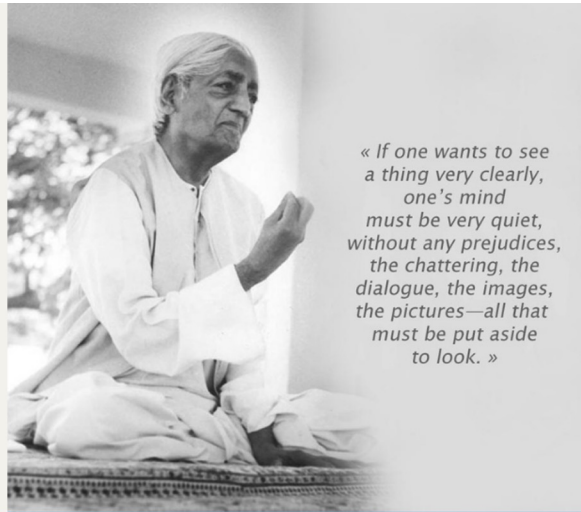
# Further Research...

I know I have only begun to scratch the surface of what might be possible looking at this range of frameworks and the work of various theorists related to:

- adult education in general,
- radical adult education,
- social movement learning theory,
- and holistic educational theory.

I also know I have a lot more to learn about ways of knowing in cultures around the world, other possible connections between spirituality, healing and trauma around the world, and how various progressive educational and social movement learning practices can inform each other.

But I think what I have learned so far is that there is a role for 'spirituality' to play in SML, and if we are going to engage more people in social movements, we need to understand what people are thinking when they join movements, and what kind of stories and ideas might engage more people; especially young people.



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## Questions?