

Short Essays for Deep Discussions

The following short essays are part of a series written for a blog sponsored by a social justice organization, and were originally intended for a general audience. As the proposals for sustainable educational reforms, as well as the analysis of sources of resistance, may contribute to a more vigorous discussion of educational reforms that address the deepening ecological crises, they are being reproduced here. The shortness of the essays may make them useful for classroom discussions of key issues related to understanding the nature of the cultural and environmental commons, how they are being enclosed by ideological and market force. While many of the references are to American higher education, the essays raise issues that are relevant to any country where universities reinforce the cultural assumptions that were constituted before there was an awareness of environmental limits, and where universities have marginalized the nature and ecological importance of the cultural and environmental common.

Author: Chet Bowers, Eugene, Oregon

Essay #1 An Overview of the Silences and Double Binds that Limit an Understanding of Ecologically Sustainable Educational Reforms

The environmental and social problems we face have increasingly ominous implications for the future. In addition to global warming, the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere is changing the chemistry of the world's oceans—which further threatens the food chain we depend upon. The shortage of potable water and loss of top soil, which are just two of many environmental changes taking place, will further add to the misery of an increasing world population. The social problems are equally daunting—especially in America where a combination of market-liberal and Christian fundamentalism has become the dominant political force. Computer-driven automation, outsourcing of jobs to low-wage regions of the world, and the disappearance of the economic safety nets that many workers previously took-for-granted, are reducing the ability of many people to meet their basic needs. At the same time the local cultural and environmental commons are rapidly being exploited as new markets by the industrial system of production and consumption. What few people recognize is that the commons, which include community-based mutual support systems as well as the intergenerational knowledge, reduce dependence upon a money-based existence. The increased use of surveillance technologies, the undermining of democratic institutions and civil safeguards, and the rise of a friend/enemy approach to politics at the local and national level, add to the list of daunting challenges faced by environmentalists, social justice advocates, and educational reformers.

One of the reasons for the environmental and political crises we now face is the market liberalism that gave conceptual and moral legitimacy to the global expansion of the industrial/consumer-dependent lifestyle. Market liberalism is now the principal source of indoctrinating people into believing that the main pathway of human history is now a source

of backwardness and a limitation on individual freedom. This pathway, which varies from culture to culture, is better known as the cultural and environmental commons. Most examples of the cultural and environmental commons encompass those aspects of daily life that had not yet been privatized and monetized. Another feature of the commons, as practiced in many cultures, is the reliance upon local decision making and an awareness that current practices should not diminish the prospects of future generations.

As I will explain in future columns, public schools and universities in the West have relegated knowledge of the cultural and environmental commons to low status by omitting it from the curriculum. The result is that many people lack the language for naming those aspects of the commons they participate in. In not being able to identify what they depend upon and experience at a taken-for-granted level of awareness, they are unable to resist the further enclosure of the commons that makes them more dependent upon consumerism. I shall also examine the nature of the linguistic double binds that lead current educational reformers to promote, in the name of individual freedom, the further emancipation from the commons sustaining intergenerational knowledge and mutual support systems. How the cultural assumptions reinforced by American professors in many disciplines contribute to large numbers of university graduates becoming die-hard supporters of President George W. Bush's market liberal domestic and foreign policies will also be examined. Perhaps the most difficult challenge will be to convince professors across the disciplines to take seriously reforms that contribute to the revitalization of the local cultural and environmental commons, and to learn how to build support within the community for living less monetized and environmentally destructive lives.

Essay # 2 Revitalizing the Cultural and Environmental Commons as Sites of Resistance to Economic Globalization

In order to understand the criticisms I am making of our educational institutions, as well as recommendations for reform, it is necessary to clarify further the nature of the cultural and environmental commons—as well as the many ways they are being enclosed. I will also explain their importance to reducing the human impact on natural systems, and how participation in the cultural commons reduces dependence upon a money economy.

The key features of the cultural and environmental commons that need to be identified if we are to counter the criticism that “we cannot go back to a simpler past” and “any discussion of the commons is the expression of romantic and wishful thinking” include the following: (1) the cultural and environmental commons began with the beginning of human history; (2) they still exist in all of the world's cultures—including both rural and urban areas in the West; (3) access to the cultural commons varies with the culture's status systems and other forms of exclusion and privilege; (4) the cultural and environmental commons in many cultures were (and still are) managed through local democracy; (5) the first acts of enclosure of the commons can be traced to introduction of private property, a money-based economy, socially stratifying religious beliefs, and, more recently, to a variety of cultural forces that range from public education, the nexus of science and technology, and the globalization of market liberal ideology.

The environmental commons, which is now being heavily impacted (enclosed) by the West's industrial culture, includes the soil, water, plants, animals, air, forests, oceans,

rocks, gene lines, and so forth. Even the microorganisms being destroyed by pesticides (which is a form of enclosure) are part of the environmental commons. The enclosure of the different aspects of the environmental commons, that is, transforming what was freely available to all to what requires participating in a money economy, can be seen in such recent developments as the corporate ownership of aquifers, the patenting of gene lines, and the privatizing of public lands and minerals.

The cultural commons are difficult to recognize, as our participation in them is largely part of the taken for granted experience of everyday life. Awareness of their loss too often occurs after they have been enclosed --when it is too late to resist. For example, individual privacy was part of our taken for granted commons until we learned in the media that surveillance technologies are being used by the government and corporations. Examples of the cultural commons that still exist include the languaging processes that are learned when born into a culture. As the moral templates of the culture are encoded in the language they become part of the taken for granted commons—until they are challenged as wrongly constituted or enclosed by market-oriented values. In addition to the languaging processes, which include the spoken and written word, narratives, patterns of metacommunication, and the creative arts, the cultural commons also includes the intergenerational knowledge and skills related to the growing, preparation, and sharing of a meal, craft knowledge, healing practices, games, knowledge of how to greet a guest, civic traditions of rights and responsibilities—among others. In other words, the cultural commons includes all the non-monetized and non-privately owned knowledge, skills, and forms of relationships that are intergenerationally passed along. While there are many examples of the cultural commons that strengthen community interdependence and have a smaller ecological impact, there also are examples of the cultural commons that are unjust, based on ignorance, and that further degrade the natural systems that life depends upon.

Enclosure may be driven by an ideology, such as market liberalism which has as its goal the transformation of what remains of the cultural and environmental commons into markets. Enclosure may also take other forms—ranging from the use of seeds genetically engineered to resist the use of Round Up, and which encloses a wide range of the farmer's knowledge of local planting conditions, to the many forms of enclosure that result from relying upon computer mediated thinking and communication. Some forms of enclosure represent genuine contributions to improving the quality of daily life, while many others, such as the World Trade Organization's legal right to override (enclose) local decision making about a variety of health, work, and environmental issues, undermine further the self-sufficiency of the community. Enclosure can also result from the loss of the collective memory of the community. When schools and universities fail to introduce students to the stories of the religious wars in Europe that led the framers of the American Constitution to provide for the separation of church and state, and when the stories of the labor, feminist, and civil rights movements are no longer part of the curriculum, these silences leave students without the language and historical perspective necessary for recognizing how the social justice gains of the past are currently being undermined.

Revitalizing the local cultural commons will not in itself reverse economic globalization. It may, however, contribute to slowing the process of environmental degradation and dependence upon a money economy that is failing millions of peoples around the world. As students become aware of the nature and importance of the cultural and environmental commons, as well as the different forms of dependencies that result from

the enclosure of what was previously freely available, perhaps they will become more critically aware of what needs to be conserved and what needs to be reformed or changed entirely.

Participation in the cultural commons--from preparing a meal from a traditional recipe, learning to play an instrument, writing poetry, using local materials and craft skills in constructing a building, to organizing local resistance to the forces enclosing their civil rights-- fosters a values-based educational experience. When students go beyond classroom learning about the local cultural commons as well as their cultural diversity, including the different forms of enclosure, to participating in mentoring relationships they are discovering and developing personal interests and talents. They are also learning to be more self-confident in skill areas, to be mutually supportive of others, and to support the patterns of moral reciprocity within the community.

Essay # 3 **How Universities Contribute to the Enclosure of the Cultural and Environmental Commons**

The same double bind that characterizes Enlightenment values and modern development is also present in Western universities. Universities are the source of many genuine achievements that have improved the quality of people's lives. However, when we weigh some of the achievements against the backdrop of global warming and recent changes in the chemistry of the oceans, as well as the ethnocentrism of Western foreign policies and the globalization of an industrial/consumer-dependent lifestyle, we are likely to wonder whether many of these achievements have put our collective future in greater jeopardy. The double bind of how some forms of success can have destructive consequences can be seen, especially in the United States, in how so many university graduates move from the classroom to becoming supporters of the market liberal domestic and foreign policy agenda of President George W. Bush.

At a later time, I will explain how the market liberal orientation of American students who mistakenly refer to themselves as conservatives is reinforced by the silences in their education, as well as by their social justice-oriented professors who share many of the same cultural assumptions that gave conceptual direction and moral legitimacy to the industrial culture that has entered its digital phase of development. But here I will focus on how the distinction between high and low status forms of knowledge (with the latter being largely left out of the university curriculum) contributes to the enclosure of what remains of the cultural and environmental commons. Several key points made in the previous discussion of the cultural and environmental commons include: communities that sustain their cultural and environmental commons rely upon the intergenerational renewal of knowledge, skills and relationships that reduce dependence upon participating in the money economy; participation in the commons often involves local decision making that takes account of the prospects of future generations, as well as social and ecojustice issues; a vital cultural and environmental commons reduces dependence upon the industrial/consumer oriented lifestyle that is contributing to global warming. Because not all cultural commons are free of oppressive relationships, the traditions of our civil liberties and critical reflection need to be renewed.

Today it is difficult to identify any aspect of the cultural commons that is entirely free of dependence upon a money economy, or any aspect of the market system that is entirely free of traditions that are part of the cultural commons. The differences are marked by degree of emphasis and dependence. This also holds for universities. Yet the case can be made that most of what is now learned in university classrooms contributes to the expansion of the market forces that are further enclosing what remains of the local cultural and environmental commons—as well as integrating what remains of the commons of other cultures into the global economy. The evidence can be found in what universities have designated as high status knowledge—and in the prejudices and silences reinforced in philosophy, political science, and economics classes, as well as in such professional courses as business and education.,

High status knowledge is based on a number of cultural assumptions that go largely unexamined in most university classrooms. They include: (1) that the individual is the basic social unit, and thus source of ideas and values; (2) that change is a progressive force and thus is to be promoted; (3) that this is an anthropocentric world and the environment is an economic resource; (4) that print and other abstract systems of representation are more reliable than oral traditions; (5) that science represents the highest and most useful approach to knowledge; (6) that language is a conduit in a sender/receiver process of communication that enables “objective” facts and information to be sent to others; (7) that technology is both culturally neutral and the expression of progress; (8) that competition in the market place, on the playing field, and among academics separates the winners from the losers; and (9) that Western forms of knowledge and values are the most culturally advanced.

These assumptions are seldom made explicit and discussed in classes. Rather, they are reinforced as part of the interpretative frameworks that are taken for granted. Thus, they contribute to the silence that surrounds low status forms of knowledge and relationships—which in turn leave students without the language that will enable them to recognize and renew the cultural practices that strengthen the non-monetized traditions of community that have a smaller adverse ecological impact. One of the chief sources of the silence about the nature and importance of the local commons, as well as their cultural diversity, can be traced to the ethnocentrism that frames what is learned in many disciplines. If this ethnocentrism were not present, students might learn that the Western ideal of becoming an autonomous individual is based on a number of myths that have been carried forward in the metaphorical language taken-for-granted by the community. They might also learn that many cultures think of the individual in terms of intergenerational relationships and interdependencies—as well as being dependent upon the life sustaining ecosystems. Learning about the diversity of the cultural and environmental commons, including the non-monetized traditions within their own communities, would provide an awareness of the extent they rely upon intergenerational knowledge—such as the growing and preparation of food, the creative arts, craft knowledge, built environments, and the language of social and ecojustice, If students lack the language necessary for making explicit how they rely upon different aspects of the cultural and environmental commons they will be less able to recognize and resist the different forms of enclosure by a market system that has no self-limiting guidelines. That is, they will be less able to recognize the transition from the mutual support systems within the community that are ecologically sustainable to becoming more dependent upon a money economy that is the basis of the industrial/consumer culture now threatening the sustaining capacity of natural systems.

Students need to develop a more balanced understanding of the importance of face-to-face communication, as well as the role that narratives play in passing on stories of injustices as

well as advances in moral relationships. This might enable them to recognize how the increasing reliance on computers contributes to enclosing more of the cultural commons. Mapping the cultural and environmental commons of their local communities is also likely to contribute to a more complex understanding, even appreciation, of intergenerational traditions that lead to the development of personal interests and talents—as well as an enhanced sense of meaning and purpose that comes from the mutual support activities within the community. Through the experience of mentoring relationships, they may discover a different form of wealth than what is required in consumer relationships.

In effect, the double bind of promoting high status knowledge that supports the further expansion of the industrial/consumer dependent culture, while leaving students largely uninformed about how the commons represent alternatives to dependence upon a consumer lifestyle that is ecologically destructive, has another consequence that needs to be emphasized. Namely, local democracy as well as our civil liberties, which are essential characteristics of the cultural commons in the West, are being enclosed by university graduates who have turned the assumptions underlying high-status knowledge into a rigid ideology—which they mistakenly identify as conservatism.

Essay #4 **Rethinking the Deep Conceptual Foundations of Educational Reform**

As land conservancy groups, environmental scientists and other activists are already working to conserve what remains of the environmental commons the following short essays will identify the misconceptions that currently underlie the modernizing and ecologically unsustainable agenda of public schools and universities that are undermining the cultural commons.

Currently, there are four main approaches to pre-university education. These include home schooling, nationally mandated programs that integrate test-based educational “outcomes” with the supposed needs of the workplace in a global economy, classrooms where teachers promote the idea that students should construct their own knowledge (computer mediated learning is seen as facilitating this approach), and teachers who simply reproduce the way in which they were taught. At the university level, there are individual faculty in different departments who are addressing environmental issues; but the majority continue to teach and write as though global warming is not occurring. As a number of observers have noted, if there is a direction to the reform of higher education it is the closer integration between research and the interests of the corporate world. A criticism that can be made even of environmentally oriented faculty is that there is little evidence that the university’s role in promoting the high-status knowledge that underlies the continued expansion of the industrial/consumer culture has changed—or even been seriously questioned. Ironically, the forms of knowledge left out of the curriculum, and thus relegated to low-status, happens to be what sustains the cultural commons that have a smaller adverse impact on natural systems.

The basic question that educational reformers need to ask is: If an increase in the level of consumerism is not a viable approach to slowing global warming, and if a combination of the present consumer dependent lifestyle and greater reliance on more efficient sources of energy and recycling in the home is not an adequate response, then what are the alternatives that will have a smaller environmental impact? I have suggested that

revitalizing the cultural commons is the only alternative that reduces the level of consumerism and thus dependence on a money economy that is increasingly unreliable, and is destructive of human potential and of natural systems.

Educational reforms that reduce dependence upon an economic system driven by the market liberal ideology that has a global agenda will require more than simply adding ecological sustainability to the social justice liberal's long list of priorities. As I have pointed out in several books and articles, both the market liberals (who out of ignorance identify themselves as conservatives) and social justice liberals share many of the same deep cultural assumptions that the industrial/consumer culture is based upon. Thus, it is necessary to recognize that ecologically sustainable educational reforms both at the public school and university level will require fundamental changes in long held patterns of thinking, including the deep taken-for-granted cultural assumptions they are based upon.

Changes in these patterns of thinking will be difficult because the personal identities and the careers of classroom teachers and professors are based upon them. That these cultural assumptions are largely taken-for-granted makes them an even greater impediment to change. What needs to be addressed are the silences and prejudices currently reinforced in school and university classrooms. These include the ethnocentrism that is still present in the current emphasis on multicultural education and the combination of silences and prejudices that contribute to the indifference that most students exhibit toward ecologically sustainable practices within their local communities. This indifference toward environmental issues is partly a result of their being captives of media sponsored hyper-consumerism and the ability of technological innovations to provide instant self-gratification.

Any serious approach to reforming education in ways that lead to lifestyles and communities that reduce our ecological footprint, as well as address social/ecojustice issues, must begin with questioning such key concepts as tradition, individualism, progress, liberalism, conservatism, and a human-centered world. Understanding the historical misconceptions reproduced in how these concepts are currently understood and used, as well as understanding the implications of such new concepts as ecology and evolution are critical to whether we can change the Titanic mind-set that is currently on a collision course with global warming and the other degraded systems we depend upon.

The starting place for aligning our guiding concepts (which need to be understood as metaphors within an historically layered system of root and iconic metaphors) is to recognize the misconceptions about the nature of language still perpetuated in both schools and universities. The primary misconception is that language is a conduit in a sender/receiver process of communication. This view of language is essential to sustaining other myths, such as the widely held idea that the rational process is uninfluenced by the assumptions of the culture, that there is such a thing as "objective" knowledge and data (as though knowledge and data at different points in their origin do not begin with culturally influenced human observation and interpretation), and that the individual has the potential (if given the right education) of becoming an autonomous thinker and moral agent. The conduit view of language also contributes to the lack of awareness that such words as tradition, individualism, progress, democracy, data, etc. have a history and that their current meaning has been framed by culturally specific root metaphors—or to use a technical phrase, the meta-cognitive schema that operates largely at the unconscious level thinking. An example of how a schema (or interpretative framework) is reproduced in the languaging processes of a culture can be seen in how such supposedly cutting edge thinkers as Richard

Dawkins and E. O. Wilson rely upon the same mechanistic model of thinking articulated centuries ago by Newton and Kepler. Other examples include how the mythopoetic narrative in the Book of Genesis continues to be the basis of thinking of a human-centered world and, until recently among segments of society, as justifying male domination.

In the next essay I will discuss the layered nature of metaphorical thinking that both illuminates and hides aspects of human experience, as well as how language carries forward the moral templates of the culture. In order to connect this discussion with the argument I am making for educational reforms that help revitalize the local commons as well as their cultural diversity, I will focus the discussion of how metaphorical thinking often carries forward the misconceptions of the past—and that the misconceptions that characterize the current understanding of individualism, tradition, progress, liberalism, conservatism, and evolution (at least its extension to include cultural memes) contribute to the current silences and prejudices that inhibit the students' ability to recognize the sustainable characteristics of the cultural and environmental commons.

Essay #5 **What Al Gore Missed: The Ecological Importance of the Cultural Commons**

The recommendations for reducing consumerism that appear at the end of Al Gore's book, An Inconvenient Truth, represent how language may contribute to enclosing the cultural commons. No one can deny that Gore's list of behaviors for reducing consumerism is sound common sense. But a list of what thoughtful people are already doing, such as buying things that last, composting, buying local, and bagging groceries in a reusable tote bag, is no substitute for suggesting a more radical approach to reducing our dependence upon the consumerism that is contributing to global warming—which his book documents so well.

Gore does not mention the diversity of the world's cultural commons, and how the intergenerational knowledge, skills, and mentoring relationships that are the basis of many of these commons represent community-centered alternatives to being dependent upon industrial food, entertainment, agricultural practices, healing, and other aspects of daily life that have been monetized. Gore's silence about the ecological importance of the cultural commons should not be taken as a sign of his disagreement with this pre and post-industrial pathway of human history. A more plausible explanation is that his formal education failed to provide the language necessary for making explicit the local cultural commons-based experiences that are largely taken-for-granted. As most people reading his list of consumer-reducing recommendations are likely to be unaware of the importance of the cultural commons he overlooks, the question arises about the culpability of our public schools and universities. If the educational process does not provide students with the language necessary for naming and thus making explicit the cultural commons they will otherwise take-for-granted, they will be less likely to recognize when different aspects of the commons have been enclosed by market forces, and by a government moving closer to equating resistance to the market liberal agenda of economic globalization with terrorism.

The formal education of most Americans has left them in the double bind where participation in the daily practices and relationships of their local cultural commons have been relegated to the area of conceptual silence, while the language that is reinforced in public schools and universities is the language of the market place, technological

innovation, expert systems, and media hype. Evidence of how widespread the public's inability to name the different aspects of the cultural commons, and to explain why they are important in terms of the narratives that are often (but not always) sources of moral guidance, traditions of civil liberties, and skills and mutual supportive relationships that are alternatives to consumerism can be found by asking classroom teachers and most university professors what they understand about the nature of the cultural commons. I have found that most of them respond with blank stares to any attempt to discuss the cultural commons. A few books are now being written about the importance of the environmental commons, as well as many articles that examine how different cultures are managing what remains of their environmental commons. This renewed interest in the commons has not influenced what is being taught in public schools and universities, as they are still in the grip of linguistic traditions that were either silent about the cultural commons—or were prejudiced toward them. To take the cultural commons seriously is to identify with what universities continue to designate as low-status and as the source of superstition and backwardness.

As pointed out in a previous essay, the metaphorical nature of language carries forward over many generations the analogs that prevailed at an earlier time of metaphorical thinking of how to understand something new. An example is the way in which E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins continue to reproduce in their writings the misconceptions of Newton and Kepler who assumed wrongly that all aspects of life could be understood as having the same properties as a machine. Few professors and even fewer classroom teachers understand how the metaphorical nature of the language they rely upon carries forward the misconceptions of the past. Unfortunately, many of these misconceptions are responsible for the silences and prejudices that characterize many people's relationships with their local cultural commons. In recent months we have witnessed important aspects of the cultural commons, such as the traditions of habeas corpus and the right to privacy, being enclosed with little or no reaction from the general public. Narratives of social justice struggles, as well as ethnic traditions related to the sharing of food and mutual support, are also being enclosed by the increasing reliance on technologically mediated communication and entertainment (e.g. cell phones, iPods, computer gaming, etc.).

If we examine the ideas, silences, and prejudices of influential thinkers in the West, such as Plato, Descartes, Locke, Smith, Spencer, and more recent philosophers, we find that they viewed local knowledge as a source of backwardness. They shared a prejudice that marginalized the knowledge systems of other cultures—which also reduced the possibility that we would understand the ecological importance of their cultural commons. What Plato, Descartes, and Locke reinforced is that there is nothing to be learned from traditions; and they, along with Smith, Spencer and recent philosophers such as Richard Rorty, reinforced the idea that words have universal meanings—quite separate from their cultural context. In effect, these early philosophers and political theorists elevated the use of abstract language over the vernacular languages built up over generations of place-based experiences. This legacy of abstract language and thinking is now used to justify the enclosure of the cultural commons around the world. This abstract language includes such words as individualism, private property, free markets, critical inquiry, progress, competition—which is the vocabulary of market liberalism. This liberal vocabulary is based on cultural assumptions still reinforced in most university courses. What this vocabulary marginalizes are the words essential to understanding the nature and importance of the cultural commons as representing alternatives to economic globalization. This alternative vocabulary includes a

more culturally informed understanding of tradition, conserving an intergenerationally connected form of individualism, non-monetized activities and patterns of mutual support, moral reciprocity between the human and non-human world. It is, in essence, the vocabulary of connectedness and interdependency that is basic to how we participate in our local cultural and environmental commons.

Another way in which the language reinforced in our educational institutions contributes to the silence found in Gore's list of recommendations is that, contrary to the conduit view of language, the languaging systems of a culture reproduce its moral templates. Thus, learning the language of the culture also involves acquiring the moral templates shared by other members of the culture. Languaging processes are about how relationships should be understood and morally conducted. Key to this process is how words encode what is understood by members of the culture about the attributes of the participants in the relationships. To make this as simple as possible, if the word "woman" is understood as not having the attributes of intelligence and strength, then the moral code of the culture allows treating women as inferior to men. If the words "weed", "wilderness", and "desert" are understood as lacking positive attributes, then it is morally sound to eradicate the weed, exploit the wilderness, and to use the desert as a toxic waste site. The fate of the cultural commons has similarly been influenced by the moral templates reproduced in the high-status vocabulary reinforced in our educational institutions. If the phrase "cultural commons" has no discernable positive attributes, then it has no moral standing—and attention will be focused on the language that identifies the many manifestations of material progress—even though this form of progress is undermining the ecosystems that we and future generations rely upon. Gore's oversight must not be viewed as his failure to learn from his professors; his failure is in taking them too seriously and in reproducing their silences.

The next essay will focus on how the educational uses of computers contribute to undermining the cultural commons, as well as the ability of teachers/professors to help students acquire the communicative competence necessary for resisting the forms of enclosure that lead to further degrading the environment and for reforming the traditions of the cultural commons that are sources of injustice.

Essay # 6 **How Public Schools and Universities Can Contribute to Reducing Consumerism**

Earlier essays discussed the nature of the cultural and environmental commons as well as how universities establish what constitutes high-status knowledge—while at the same time relegating to low-status the face-to-face, intergenerational and largely non-monetized knowledge and relationships that are part of every local cultural commons. The many environmentally oriented courses now offered in most universities also deserve comment before I suggest the direction that educational reform needs to take if it is to rectify the silences in Al Gore's thinking about how to reduce consumerism. Most departments in universities now offer environmentally oriented courses where students may study the history of environmental thought, eco-criticism, environmental ethics, environmental sociology, religion and ecology, and so forth. These courses, as important as they are, share a common limitation; namely, they are taught within the conceptual framework of the professor's academic discipline.

A major limitation of this approach is that none of the academic disciplines have made the cultural commons the main focus of study. That is, few if any focus on how people can live less consumer dependent lives, and how conserving the world's diversity of cultural commons is essential to living in a sustainable relationship with the natural systems. There is a similar lack of focus on the different forms of enclosure that range from the introduction of new technologies, modernizing ideologies, to religious fundamentalism. The promotion of high-status knowledge, with its emphasis on reinforcing the same cultural assumptions that gave conceptual direction and moral legitimacy to the industrial revolution that is now being globalized, has resulted in universities being major contributors to the environmental crises. Unfortunately, many of the professors who are addressing environmental issues within the conceptual framework of their discipline still promote these deep, taken-for-granted cultural assumptions about individualism, the progressive nature of change, the ethnocentrism implicit in their view of the rational process and critical inquiry as the one true approach to knowledge, and the conduit view of language.

These assumptions are also responsible for the misrepresentations that impede the ability of most students to recognize the ecological importance of the local cultural commons—and the different forms of non-monetized wealth that accompany the discovery of personal interests and talents, participating in mentoring relationships, and in becoming more intergenerationally connected and responsible. Unless they are part of a religious and ethnic group that values traditions as essential to their identity and sense of community, most students will leave the university with the idea that traditions are impediments to progress. And most will take-for-granted the assumptions that underlie both market and social justice liberalism—with few being aware of the traditions of conservative thinking that underlie the checks and balances system of government, the Constitution, and that there is a connection between thinking of Edmund Burke and Wendell Berry. Indeed, most students will reproduce the formulaic thinking of their professors that leads to labeling the market liberalism of President George W. Bush and think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute as conservative. Nor will they recognize the importance of asking what these faux conservatives want to conserve

The following is a brief introduction to the educational reforms that need to be undertaken if future graduates are to avoid the naïve thinking found in Al Gore's recommendations for reducing consumerism. As the limited space here allows for only an overview of these reforms; if anyone is interested in a more extended discussion they should go to <http://cabowers.net/> and click on Handbook. The basic focus of educational reforms should be to educate students to understand the differences in how the local cultural commons and the industrial/consumer culture impact natural systems—as well as how they influence community traditions of self-reliance and mutual support. That is, educational reforms need to help students understand how the different aspects of the local cultural commons enable them to live less money dependent and less environmentally destructive lives. They also need to learn about why the diversity of the world's cultural commons are sites of resistance to the forces of economic globalization that are adding to global warming.

What is critically important at this time is for students to acquire the background knowledge that will enable them to recognize what is being lost when different traditions of the cultural commons are being undermined by economic and ideological forces. That most students, as well as adults, participate in their local cultural commons at a taken-for-granted level of awareness creates a special challenge for classroom teachers and university professors. In addition to being able to make explicit the largely non-monetized activities and relationships that are at the center of community life, classroom teachers and professors also will need the background knowledge

necessary for helping students to become explicitly aware of the differences in their experiences as they move between the non-monetized and monetized sub-cultures. That is, as mediators they need to help students recognize the differences between food prepared in accordance with traditional recipes and industrial prepared food, between volunteering in a community project and working in a highly structured job, between developing their own creative talents and purchasing a commercially produced artistic creation, between the experience of being free of constant surveillance and being under constant surveillance, between the experience of being innocent until proven guilty and the possibility that because of a mistake in identity one might be imprisoned without legal recourse. These are only a few of the fundamental differences between the cultural commons and market-oriented culture that need to be clarified.

However, it is not just a matter of recognizing differences. Rather, the teacher/professor's role as a mediator also includes encouraging students to make explicit and thus name the differences in how their experiences in the two sub-cultures influence the development of their personal talents, the nature of their relations with others, as well how the experiences in the two sub-cultures influence their sense of empowerment, dependency, and social justice. Just as feminists became empowered when they began to name the different expressions of gender bias, being able to name what is otherwise experienced as the taken-for-granted is the first step to becoming communicative competent and thus to revitalizing local democracy as a key element in the local cultural commons.

Mediating between the students' experiences means helping students examine the practices in both the non-monetized and monetized sub-cultures in terms of what contributes to an ecologically sustainable future. Some of the achievements of the industrial culture will be recognized as worth retaining while others, such the patenting of gene lines and the creation of "terminator seeds" will be seen as adding to poverty and as environmentally destructive. Similarly, there will be aspects of the cultural commons that need to be reformed or rejected entirely.

The focus on what is sustainable also requires that the public school teacher and university professor be able to clarify the historical and ideological forces that underlie the various forms of enclosure that turn the cultural commons into commodities and expert services that require participating in the money economy. Learning about the tensions and interdependencies between the two sub-cultures students participate in on a daily basis is profoundly different from an education that introduces students to the abstract knowledge that is too often based on the intellectual interests of their professors or designers of curriculum materials. For example, because few philosophy professors have an interest in the cultural commons students are unlikely to learn how Western philosophers contributed to privileging a vocabulary that is largely responsible for the silences about the importance of the cultural commons and for the ethnocentrism that has prejudiced students to thinking that there is nothing to learn from other cultures about how to live more ecologically centered lives. Nor are they likely to learn from professors in other disciplines how other aspects of the cultural commons have been enclosed. As pointed out earlier, the prejudices inherent in the different disciplines frame what will be the focus of attention and what is marginalized. Our future prospects will depend in part on learning to renew the cultural commons that have been marginalized by most academic disciplines.

Before explaining why students need to understand the differences between computer mediated thinking and communication, and the face-to-face, intergenerationally connected relationships that are part of the process of renewing the cultural commons it is important to explain at the outset why computers should not be viewed as a culturally neutral technology. Like the use of other technologies, they select for amplification certain aspects of human experience, while reducing others. They can store, model, schedule, retrieve, design, monitor, and communicate information and data over vast distances, as well as perform many other useful functions. But they have serious limitations, such as being unable to reproduce embodied experiences, differences in cultural contexts, tacit understandings, the complex messages that are part of oral communication, the history of the analogs encoded in the language that appears on the screen, mentoring relationships. In addition to reinforcing a Cartesian way of thinking that privileges the individual's perspective and sense of agency, and its increasing influential role in bringing more of everyday life under constant surveillance by government and corporations, other limitations of computer mediated learning can be traced to the cultural assumptions of the people who write the software-- which often go unnoticed because of the way that print reinforces the idea that what appears on the screen is objective and factual.

In the short space allowed here I will focus on some of the positive characteristics of computers when they are used in classrooms and in online courses, and then discuss why computers undermine the classroom teacher's and professor's mediating role in helping students recognize the differences between their experiences in the cultural commons and in the industrial consumer culture they also participate in on a daily basis. In the upper grades as well as in university classes, the role of the teacher and professor continues much as before computers appeared on the scene. Assignments are expanded by using the computer a research tool that provides access to a wider range of information—including already written papers that students can download and hand in as evidence of their own diligent efforts. When communication between the professor and student is online, computers change the relationship in fundamental ways. Online relationships have the advantage of marginalizing skin color, as well as the clothes and body language that communicate social classes and ethnic differences that sometimes are the basis of prejudicial judgments on the part of the teacher and professor. Computers also tend to make the relationship between students and teacher/professor less hierarchical, as well as freeing students to exchange ideas with each other—rather than with an authority figure standing in the front of the room. Ideas and questions can be exchanged without becoming part of the power relations that are communicated through the body language that is often misinterpreted and thus damaging to achieving mutual understanding of what is being discussed.

What may not occur to the professors, or to the administrators ever in search of new markets from which to draw students, is that the online courses represent a form of cultural colonization to the idea that education automatically translates into a higher material standard of living. The colonization to the industrial/consumer mind set takes two forms: that of educating students to taken-for-granted Western assumptions—including the assumptions that Western technologies and ways of thinking are the most progressive and enlightened in the world. The other form of colonization that online education promotes is the way it represents both directly and indirectly the knowledge, practices, and activities of the world's diverse cultural commons as the expression of backwardness—even though the cultural commons are, in many instances, a storehouse of knowledge about how to live the self-sufficient/less-consumer lifestyle that global warming will eventually force all cultures to adopt. Indeed, at all levels of the educational process, and in all

cultures, the message is continually reinforced that computer mediated thinking and communication is essential to earning a living in the global economy.

In summary, when we begin to consider the relationships and forms of knowledge that are part of the process of mediating between the two different cultural orientations, we find that computers are extremely limiting. In comparing the limitations of computer-based learning to what is required when teachers and professors view their responsibility as mediating between the students' experience as they move between the two cultural orientations, we find the following: (1) As mediators teachers and professors need an in-depth knowledge of the local culture that others take-for-granted—including the taken-for-granted conceptual and materialistic moral foundations of the culture of consumerism as well as the moral traditions that are the legacy of social justice achievements that are part of the cultural commons.. (2) The mediating process also requires face-to-face questioning, sharing of insights, developing the language for naming what previously was the un-named and un-recognized part of experience, and the continual comparing of the abstract representations of everyday experience with embodied experiences. None of these requirements can be met by the experts who write the software, as they will be unable to represent accurately the local experiences, cultural contexts, and the characteristics of the bioregion. The best they can do is construct abstract scenarios and models that may replicate certain cultural patterns of decision-making—but they will still be abstract and thus reinforce the spectator and game-oriented mentality of students.

The use of constructivist theories to justify the increasing reliance upon computers is also problematic. Over the years, constructivist approaches to learning in the child-centered classrooms did not lead students to ask about racism and gender bias, nor were they concerned about the destruction of the cultural and environmental commons that were coming under assault by the new technologies and market forces. Learning about the skills and accumulated knowledge connected with most cultural commons activities will be beyond the grasp of students who have been indoctrinated into believing that they can only find oppression and the stunting of their creative insights if they learn from the traditions of their community. The questions that should have been asked by the early progressive educators, and by today's proponents of constructivist computer-based learning are: Will reliance upon the students' immediate experience and insights enable them to learn about the medicinal characteristics of different plants, how to perform the skills connected with the building trades, how to prepare a meal that has the right nutritional ingredients, how to set up a loom and to play a game of chess, and the civil rights they should protect? Will they be able to recognize the political changes that characterized how other democratic societies allowed themselves to be transformed into fascist societies? What the constructivist-oriented classroom teachers will not do out of fear of imposing their knowledge on supposedly vulnerable students is to ask the important questions, and to introduce students to an understanding of the historical forces that continue to influence present ways of thinking. And this is exactly what the role of mediator requires—to ask the questions about the taken-for-granted and ecologically problematic aspects of the culture that few if any students have the background knowledge to ask. It is in knowing what the important questions are-- what taken-for-granted ways of thinking and experience need to be named and thus critically examined, what needs to be changed and what needs to be intergenerationally renewed--that makes the constructivist approach to teaching and learning so inadequate. Indeed, given the silences about the nature of the ecological crises that characterize the thinking of constructivist learning advocates, it would not be incorrect to say that their approach is an example of the culturally and ecologically uninformed leading those who lack the background for recognizing what is happening to the environment on a global scale.

Computer based learning provides access to important and to what is often misleading information, as well as a sense of an abstract community that reduces personal vulnerabilities. However, it can never be the basis for learning about the experiential differences between the cultural commons and a money dependent existence--or about the cultural roots of the ecological crisis that the computer, as well as the people who use it, are complicit in deepening.

Essay # 8 **Western Philosophers, the Titanic Mind-Set, and the Upcoming Collision with Environmental Limits**

The changes occurring in the natural systems we depend upon-- from global warming to the changes in the chemistry of the oceans, and now to the rapid decline in plant pollinators--suggest that our problems are much deeper than relying upon outdated carbon emitting technologies. One feature common to all forms of environmental degradation is that these changes have been occurring over hundreds of years, with the rate of change accelerating in recent years. That is, the changes have been part of the environmental context within which people's lives have been embedded. Yet, with the exception of recent scientific reports and the efforts of environmentally aware citizens, the language that organizes people's ways of thinking (including the language reinforced in public schools and most university classes) continues to marginalize an awareness of local environmental contexts. It also marginalizes awareness of the differences between embodied experiences in the cultural commons and in the culture of industrially produced products and services. What will be addressed here is how the tradition of Western philosophy has contributed to the pattern of context free thinking, and to reliance on metaphors that encode analogs that were constituted before there was an awareness of environmental limits.

The way Western philosophers contributed to a tradition of abstract thinking that is now putting us on a collision course with environmental limits deserves a more extended treatment than these short pages allows. Thus, readers may find it useful to read the chapter with a similar title in my online book, **CRITICAL ESSAYS ON THE ENCLOSING OF THE CULTURAL COMMONS** <http://cabowers.net/>. I shall touch on the features of key Western philosophers who contributed to the pattern of thinking that assumed that words, such as rationality, individualism, progress, freedom, development, etc., have a universal meaning that transcends different cultural contexts. Plato made a major contribution to this tradition of marginalizing the cultural and environmental contexts that have influenced the language and thought patterns of many non-Western cultures when he introduced the idea of "pure thinking" about a reality that is independent of experience and of the cultural and environmental ecology it is always embedded in—as Gregory Bateson argues. Plato also contributed to three other traditions that strengthened the Western prejudices and silences about the nature and importance of the cultural and environmental commons. These include his rejection of narratives and poetry as unreliable sources of knowledge, his arguments that indirectly marginalized the importance of intergenerational knowledge (traditions), his silence about the nature of other cultural ways of knowing (which were part of his cultural world), and the ways in which cultures degraded the environments they depended upon.

Descartes and Locke further strengthened the idea that intergenerational knowledge, which they understood as traditions, is an impediment to the efficacy of their respective approaches to knowledge. They also continued Plato's silences about other cultural ways of knowing, and the dangers of degrading natural systems. If these examples appear unrelated to my argument that these philosophers, along with Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill (among others) contributed to the current tradition of relying upon an abstract vocabulary that continues to marginalize an awareness of cultural and environmental contexts, I suggest they read current philosophers such as John Dewey and Richard Rorty—and even scientists such as E. O. Wilson and Francis Crick. Readers should also examine how many current philosophers are aware of other cultural ways of knowing, the nature and importance of the cultural and environmental commons—and, most importantly, how the meaning associated with such metaphors as individualism, tradition, intelligence, conservatism, liberalism, progress, and so forth, are based on the analogs that were constituted during the period of Enlightenment thinking. This lack of awareness of the cultural commons also accounts for why philosophers have been so slow to recognize those aspects of the cultural commons that were (and continue to be) sources of injustice—such as the tradition of patriarchy, racism, cultural colonization, and the ecological crises.

This brief overview of the silences and prejudices that have characterized the tradition of mainstream Western philosophy brings us to the next question: namely, how can we begin to rely upon a metaphorical language that is informed by current analogs --rather than the analogs derived from the thinking of Plato, Descartes, Locke and other philosophers taught in our universities? The problem is made more difficult by the fact that current analogs are often misleading, and may have long-term negative consequences. For example, some prominent scientists now argue that cultures are also subject to the process of natural selection by claiming that cultural patterns are “memes” that must meet the same test of Darwinian fitness as “genes”. Their extension of the theory of natural selection provides a powerful analog for market liberals who claim that corporations should only be held accountable to meeting Nature's test of survival of the fittest. Using the computer as an analog for how to think about the human brain is also profoundly misleading.

Gregory Bateson and Clifford Geertz provide two important insights that may contribute to a more accountable use of the metaphors that play such an important role in framing how we think and in determining what is being marginalized or relegated to the realm of silence. Bateson's insight was about the nature of double bind thinking. Double bind thinking, as he explains, relies upon analogs formed in the distant past by thinkers engaged in a political process who were unable to account of our current cultural and ecological context. Thus, the analogs derived from the ideas of classical liberal thinkers, which many of today's market liberals, and even environmentalists, take-for-granted can be traced back to the analogs derived from the writings of Locke, Smith, and Herbert Spencer (who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest”). To cite yet another example, the metaphor “tradition” still carries forward the analogs of these early Enlightenment thinkers who associated traditions with the church, privileges of the aristocracy, and the Great Chain of Being that limited people's opportunities. In effect, overcoming double bind thinking involves understanding that the language we use may carry forward the misconceptions of the past. Overcoming the problem of double bind thinking requires drawing from current experiences in the matrix of cultural and ecological patterns the analogs that will connect our political discourse and policies with the realities we now face—which means

recognizing that progress (unlike the Enlightenment view) often introduces changes in other parts of the layered and interdependent ecological systems that may be destructive.

Geertz' idea of "thick description" is also relevant to ensuring that our metaphors are based on analogs that take account of our current situation of living in a culturally and ecologically diverse world. Thick description involves considering all the background (history of previous relationships, memory, class and social status, gender issues, etc.) that needs to be taken into account in understanding the difference between an involuntary wink and the influences on and the purpose of the wink that is intentional. Thick description also needs to be used in identifying the patterns, history, political issues, and all the rest of the ecology of relationships and ideas that can serve as analogs for understanding such terms as individualism, freedom, progress, traditions, intergenerational knowledge, the commons, conservatism and liberalism, data, and so on. If we were to do a thick description of what it means to be an individual, free, to progress, to be a liberal or a conservative, and so on, that take account of the multiple layers of relationships and taken-for-granted traditions that are part of context and tacit dimensions of the experience commonly associated with these metaphors the question of which analogs would be the more accurate. Those derived from the Enlightenment thinkers or from the process of thick description? What examples would we come up with in terms of saying that our experience of being an individual is "like this" experience? Would the thick description also enable us to recognize that our individualism is always part of a larger ecology of interdependent relationships—including the language derived from earlier non-ecologically aware theorists who ignored context, tacit understandings and the taken-for-granted nature of most culturally mediated human experience?

Western philosophers put us on the path of double bind thinking, and our universities continue to ignore that our context-free metaphors that are the basis of so much contemporary thinking need to meet the test of thick description—and that the process of thick description needs to include the ecological footprint of human behavior that is based on the analogs derived from the Enlightenment.

Essay # 9 **Translating Theory into Ecologically Sustainable Educational Practices**

The previous essay explained how metaphors carry forward the analogs that are the source of double bind thinking today, and on how the process of thick description is essential to establishing current and more ecologically sustainable analogs, packed a lot into a few short sentences. Admittedly, the essay made for pretty dense reading. Nevertheless, it provides the conceptual framework for understanding why so much of what is learned in public schools and universities reinforces the same mind-set that continues to be a major contributor to the deepening ecological crises.

To review the chief characteristic of double bind thinking: it involves relying upon the analogs constituted in the distant past when there was no understanding of environmental limits, the nature and ecological importance of the cultural commons, the diversity of cultural ways of knowing and thus of their cultural commons. These analogs also carried forward what Enlightenment thinkers marginalized and fundamentally misrepresented as sources of backwardness: namely such words as tradition, conserving, intergenerational knowledge, community-centered technologies, etc. The role that thick

description plays in overcoming how language based on abstract and long held analogs reproduces today the misconceptions of the past is the other key idea. An example of how words (metaphors) reproduce the misconceptions and prejudices of the past can be seen in how the word “Luddite” is still used today to dismiss people as being against technology. What the Luddites were really against was industrial technology that threatened their skills and the rhythms and interdependencies of community life. Examples of how thick description undermines the use of abstractions (that is words –metaphors—used today in a formulaic way) can be seen in the way feminists described the history of bias, exploitation, and marginalization. Thick description led to understanding the word “women” as having many possibilities and talents—and thus not limited to the stereotype that was encoded in the earlier formulaic use of the word. Thick description, in effect, problematizes the use of stereotypes that carry forward the analogs formed at an earlier time. Metaphors used today that are in need of being subjected to thick description include thinking of the brain as like a “machine” and operating on “software”, cultural patterns as like “memes”, and the “patriotism” that is being equated with supporting the President’s foreign policies of aggression.

The question now is why should the classroom teacher and university professor understand the nature of double bind thinking? And equally important, when should they encourage students to find more current and ecologically informed analogs by engaging in a thick description of words whose historically derived analogs are otherwise taken-for-granted? Again, this may sound like a heavy-duty discussion that would only interest an academic; but the reality is that these relationships need to be understood if we are to take seriously Albert Einstein’s observation that you cannot use the same mind-set to resolve the problems that were created by that mind-set. To put it more directly, classroom teachers and university professors need to help students identify current analogies that reflect both the cultural and ecological dimensions of daily experience. We need to stop relying on the past forms of intelligence now encoded in much of our language. The practical implications can be seen in the way feminists freed themselves from the patriarchal analogs that went unquestioned for centuries. The civil rights movement was also the outcome of this process of challenging how the dominant society relied upon the analogs from the distant past to justify the oppression and marginalization of African Americans—as well as indigenous cultures, and, now, various immigrant populations.

If students are going to learn about the community-centered alternatives that will enable them to live less consumer dependent lives, and to discover their own talents and future roles as mentors in an activity that is part of the cultural commons, classroom teachers and university professors will need to engage them in a thick description of the linguistic legacy of the Enlightenment thinkers who followed in Plato’s footsteps of relying upon “pure thinking” that was divorced from local contexts, embodied experiences, and an awareness of human/nature dependencies. Nearly every aspect of the curriculum contains words that are part of the process of socialization where cultural context and the embodied experience of students are marginalized or relegated to the realm of silence. Examples may help here. Students who read or are told about technology are seldom asked to describe the ways in which different technologies mediate their experience—such as influencing their relationships with others, how they think, forms of dependency and empowerment, and so forth. Another typical example of how the meaning of a word is dependent upon an analog constituted in the distant past can be seen in how “community” is explained in third grade

textbooks—as a place where people work, shop, and play. The thick description would bring out that community involves relationships with animals, plants, changes in weather, aesthetic experiences, awareness of the trails and sacred places of earlier inhabitants, and so forth. To cite another example, the title of the textbook, Our World, also carries forward an analog of the past that was based on the widely held root metaphor that represented humans as at the center of the universe and as in control of nature.

There are other metaphors that carry forward the misconceptions of Enlightenment thinkers that continue to be reinforced at all levels of public and university education—metaphors that make it more difficult for students to recognize the patterns of community self-sufficiency, interdependence, and ecological importance of the local cultural commons—which differ from culture to culture and from bioregion to bioregion. These metaphors include “individualism”, “freedom”, “liberalism”, “tradition”, “conserving” and “conservatism”, “intelligence”, “progress”, “technology”, “free- markets” and so forth. If students were to do a thick description of liberalism (which has its conceptual roots in the non-culturally informed theory-based thinking of John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill, etc.) they would find that the analogs associated with such words as freedom, individualism, progress, and a human-centered world, would have to be radically altered in order to take account of how language carries forward and influences what and how the “individual” thinks, how she/he is dependent upon natural systems, how progress always involves unintended consequences and often leaves problematic traditions still in place, how different technologies mediate and thus are not a neutral tool, and so forth. Similarly, a thick description of the students’ experience of traditions (rather than relying upon the decontextualized analogs taken-for-granted in the formulaic use of the word) would encompass the whole range of daily experience that involve the re-enactment of patterns and ways of thinking that have been carried forward from the past. It took Edward Shils over 350 pages to describe the complexity of traditions. And he was not making an argument for traditions. Rather, he was doing a thick description of how traditions are carried forward as part of people’s taken-for-granted experience—as well as the misconceptions that lead people to be unaware of when important traditions, such as habeas corpus and privacy are being enclosed by other traditions like ideologies, market forces, and the drive to create technologies as total surveillance systems.

The key point here is that unless students are able to recognize how their thinking is largely dependent upon words (metaphors) whose meanings are framed by analogs constituted in the past (and are largely taken-for-granted today), they will continue to ignore the local cultural commons that need to be revitalized as alternatives to the consumer-dependent lifestyle that is exacerbating global warming and the other forms of environmental degradation. The double bind that is being perpetuated today results from the failure of classroom teachers and university professors to rectify the meaning of key metaphors. Many of these metaphors, and the analogs they encode, will continue to be taken-for-granted by classroom teachers and university professors—including the old assumptions that the techno-scientists will find a solution to global warming, and that progress will continue as long as people increase their level of consumerism and as market forces continue to enclose what remains of the world’s diversity of cultural commons.

Essay#10 A Guide for Classroom Teachers and University Professors

Discussions of educational reforms that address how to revitalize the cultural commons as well as how to help students develop the communicative competence necessary for engaging in the political process of resisting various forms of environmentally and community forms of enclosure too often are met with indifference or a blank stare that indicates a lack of understanding. Why otherwise intelligent people are unable to recognize the community and ecological importance of the cultural commons can be traced to the way in which public schools and universities have relegated the forms of knowledge and skills that sustain the cultural commons to such low status that they are left out of the curriculum. Thus, in order to discuss educational reforms that address how to revitalize the local cultural commons in an era of global warming and economic globalization, it is first necessary to have a clear understanding of the characteristics of the cultural commons and the different forms of enclosure. The following provides an introductory overview.

Key Characteristics of the Cultural Commons

- The cultural commons represent the largely non-monetized and non-commodified knowledge, skills, activities and relationships that exist in every community.
- They are part of the intergenerational legacy within communities that enable people to engage in activities and relationships that are largely outside of the mainstream consumer, money dependent culture.
- The cultural commons are intergenerationally passed along through face-to-face relationships that may include mentoring.
- The nature of the cultural commons vary from culture to culture, with ethnic groups often sharing aspects of the cultural commons with the dominant culture as well as maintaining their own cultural commons.
- The cultural commons of some cultures may be the source of unjust social practices, while in other cultures the cultural commons carry forward the traditions essential to civil liberties and democratic practices.
- The cultural commons are the basis of local economies and systems of mutual support that contrast sharply with the market system that is driven by the need to create a demand for the constant stream of new products.
- Participation in different aspects of the local cultural commons enables people to discover personal interests, develop skills, and to engage with others in ways that strengthen the sense of community belonging and responsibility.

- The cultural commons, in relying upon non-industrial approaches to production and consumption, have a smaller adverse impact on natural systems.
- The activities and skills that are expressions of the cultural commons connect the generations in ways that are profoundly different from relationships that characterize relationships in a consumer-oriented culture. Moral reciprocity, receptivity to intergenerational learning and mentoring, and an awareness of what needs to be conserved as essential to community identity and self-sufficiency are more easily learned.
- Embodied experiences in the cultural commons are more likely to strengthen the propensity to cooperate rather than to compete, and to lead to identifying oneself more in terms of mutually supportive relationships and personal talents rather than as an autonomous individual who relies upon consumerism as the marker of success.
- The cultural commons strengthen the patterns of mutual support and face-to-face relationships with a broader segment of the community, and thus strengthen the practice of local democracy.
- The cultural commons are under constant threat from ideological, techno-scientific developments, and efforts of the market system to incorporate different aspects of the cultural commons into the market system—thus transforming what remains of community self-sufficiency into dependence upon the market and a money economy.

Examples of Intergenerational Knowledge, Skills, Practices, and Activities Identified as the Cultural Commons: (this list will vary from community to community, and between ethnic groups within the community)

- **Food:** Growing, preparing, and ways of sharing food. Includes knowledge of growing conditions, recipes for preparing food, traditions of sharing food that strengthen family and ethnic solidarity.
- **Healing Practices:** Intergenerational knowledge of medicinal characteristics of plants, traditions of providing different forms of support for members of the community that have physical and emotional problems
- **Creative Arts:** Various forms of dance, theatre, poetry, writing, painting, sculpture, photography that involve community participation, development of interests and talents, and are only minimally dependent upon the market system of production and consumption.
- **Narratives and ceremonies:** The narratives that are expressions of community memory ranging from sports, achievements in the area of social justice, exemplary individuals who have made major contributions and those who had a destructive influence. Ceremonies that celebrate important events, religious traditions, and so

forth. Important to passing on the moral values of the group and strengthening ethnic, working class, religious and other forms of group identity.

- **Craft Knowledge and Skills:** Activities that combine aesthetic judgment and skill in working with wood, metal, clay, jewelry, glass. Produces both useful objects as well as provides for individual expression that has a transformative effect on the quality of everyday life that raises it above the banal, what is routine and taken-for-granted.
- **Games and Outdoor Activities:** Intergenerational knowledge, skills, and moral guidelines carried forward in various games ranging from playing chess, cards, to football, track, tennis, and other games. Also, includes hiking, birding, camping, and so forth. Many of these activities increasingly are becoming commercialized and thus are being transformed in community destructive ways.
- **Animal Husbandry and Care:** Intergenerational knowledge about the care, breeding, and uses of different animals—from sheep dogs, horses, to household pets. Encompasses a wide range of knowledge about sources of feed, habits and traits of the animal, to how to treat physical and other forms of disabilities.
- **Political Traditions:** Democratic practices, traditions that protect civil liberties achieved in the past, modes of political discourse, moral codes that govern political outcomes not dependent upon use of force and violence, protection of minority groups and points of view.
- **Language:** Vocabulary that illuminates and hides in terms of the culture's priorities and prejudices, may be a storehouse of knowledge of local ecosystems, frames different forms of social relationships, reproduces the misconceptions of earlier thinkers, may carry forward the wisdom of earlier times, essential to communicative competence, may be used by totalitarian forces to control consciousness and behavior, has a different cultural influence depending upon whether it communicated face-to-face or mediated through print and electronic modes of communication.

Forms of Enclosure:

- **General definition:** Enclosure involves transforming the cultural and environmental commons from what is largely shared in common, and subject to local decision making, into what is privately owned, part of the industrial/market economy, and where decision making is located outside the community.
- **Ideologies:** The tradition of market liberalism, with its emphasis on expanding markets and profits, private ownership, and on ignoring cultural differences, continues to be a major source of enclosure. Religious fundamentalism may also lead to different forms of enclosure such as civil liberties, narratives of achievements in the areas of social justice and environmental protection.
- **Technologies:** The mediating characteristics of different technologies contribute to various forms of enclosure—from the way computers enclosure (marginalize) the

- possibility of mentoring and face-to-face communication, the enclosure of privacy by surveillance technologies, the enclosure of craft knowledge by automated machines, to the bio-technologies that now make it possible for private ownership of gene lines.
- **Universities that Define What Constitutes High-Status knowledge:** By identifying what constitutes high status knowledge (which is based on many of the same deep cultural assumptions that underlie the industrial/consumer oriented culture that is contributing to the ecological crises) universities and colleges have relegated the various forms of knowledge that are the basis of the cultural commons to low status—with the result that few graduates are aware of the complexity and ecological significance of the cultural commons of their communities.
 - **Silences Perpetuated by Modern Forms of Development:** The emphasis on change, individualism, consumerism, personal happiness and interests (as well as the personal insecurities that accompany the modern industrial system of production and consumption) has resulted in social divisions where the younger generation is unaware of how participation in the local cultural commons may lead to discovering personal interests, the development of skills and talents, and a sense of community. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that most of the younger generation is predisposed to reject the cultural commons as irrelevant. The older generations who have discovered personal fulfillment and ways of creative expression from participating in different activities within the local cultural commons too often remain isolated from the younger generation. What is being enclosed are the intergenerational continuities, which leaves the younger generation more dependent upon what the market can provide.
 - **Economic Globalization:** Western traditions that are being universalized-- such as approaches to education, various uses of computers, science, English and other dominant languages, market system of production and consumptions, military domination, etc.,--are contributing to the enclosure of many of the world's languages and thus of the world's cultural commons. The result is that more people are becoming dependent upon consumerism and thus adding to the forces deepening the ecological crises

Essay # 11 The Practice of a Values-Based Education

The readers in cyberspace have been very patient about not asking me to elaborate directly on the nature of a values-based education that would be consistent with Rabbi Michael Lerner's covenant. The previous "stories" have taken the reader on a wide tour of issues that are not usually discussed in thinking about educational reforms; thus, it is somewhat surprising that I have not received more critical comments. Having examined how universities promote the same high-status ideas and values that underlie the industrial/consumer oriented culture, how the metaphorical nature of language carries

forward the misconceptions of earlier thinkers as well as the tradition of relying on words that are “context independent”, and how the local cultural commons represent alternatives to dependence upon a level of consumerism that is a major contributor to global warming, it is now time to focus on educational reforms that will contribute to achieving the values that Rabbi Lerner has made the center piece of Covenant # 4.

The values Rabbi Lerner identifies as essential-- such as intellectual curiosity, emotional and spiritual intelligence, a commitment to freedom, justice, and peace--cannot be given more than lip-service by teachers/professors if the daily experience of students reinforces the values and uncertainties of the market place. The voice of the teacher/professor will sound ritualistic in comparison with the daily pressures of working in repetitive and unfulfilling jobs, increasing personal debt, uncertainties of economic and food security, daily reporting of collusion between government and corporate interests, and the failures of an immoral imperialistic foreign policy. Social justice and environmental educators have attempted to reverse the ecologically and community-destructive slippery slope that has been a hallmark of America, but have had only minor successes. And even the minor successes, especially in the area of racial and gender equality, have failed to slow the rate of environmental degradation—which is now a world-wide crisis. In spite of their well intended efforts, teachers/professors have also failed to educate students about the community-centered alternatives to the hyper-consumerism lifestyle, as well as how the industrial/consumer-oriented culture undermines local democracy and traditions of community self-sufficiency. As mentioned in previous essays, few teachers/professors recognize that a major contributor to the current political, ecological, and moral crises is the hyper-consumerism promoted by the market liberal ideology, with its emphasis on ever increasing profits, expansion of markets, and exploitation of workers and consumers.

When teachers/professors become aware that reducing the level of consumerism is as essential, if not more so, than the adoption of more technologies that have a smaller carbon footprint, they then may begin to recognize that the small group of colleagues advocating for the renewal of community need their support if the current environmental, political, and economic trends are to be reversed. And when this realization is more widely accepted, they will find that curriculum reforms must be centered on introducing students to an understanding of the local cultural and environmental commons. the importance of maintaining the diversity of the world’s commons, the economic, ideological, and technological forces that are enclosing them (that is turning what was previously a largely non-monetized relationship and activity into one that is monetized and subject to market forces). The values identified in the Covenant on values-based education can only be fully realized in face-to-face, intergenerationally connected communities where individuals discover personal talents, develop skills and the communicative competence essential to participatory democracy—and not in the market-centered existence where selfishness and competitiveness are essential to the “survival- of-the-fittest” ethos.

Educational reforms that focus on revitalizing the local cultural and environmental commons in rural and urban America will require that the taken-for-granted interpretative framework reinforced today in most classrooms about individual autonomy, the progressive nature of change, and a human-centered world will need to be examined critically. The

curriculum should focus on the tensions existing between the traditions of self-sufficiency and personal empowerment found in most aspects of the cultural commons as well as the forms of deskilling, disempowering, and ecological degradation that is connected with being so totally dependent upon consumerism that has now entered its globalization phase. The overriding questions that should be addressed in the students' examination of different aspects of the cultural commons and the industrial/consumer culture include: How are relationships affected? Does the activity contribute to the development of personal talents and skills? Is it mutually supportive of others? Does it contribute to becoming less dependent upon a money economy? What impact does it have on the natural environment? Does it diminish the prospects of future generations? Does it require the exploitation of others? Is the activity and the way of thinking it requires free of oppressive implications for others?

If these questions are considered carefully, rather than seen as a ritualistic check list, what should become clear is that a curriculum that is centered on the tensions between the cultural and environmental commons, and the industrial culture that is tireless in enclosing what remains of the world's commons, will focus on learning about relationships, and the connections between the language acquired in becoming a member of the language community and what is marginalized, silenced, and misrepresented. As pointed out in previous essays, the language learned in public schools and universities has marginalized the importance of being aware of the nature and importance of the cultural commons, the culturally non-neutral nature of technology, the ways in which language carries forward the misconceptions of earlier theorists who were unaware of environmental limits and different cultural ways of knowing. And it has reinforced the myth of the autonomous individual who is separate from the world that she/he observes and acts upon. A curriculum, which can be introduced in the earliest grades and developed in greater depth at the university level, that focuses on different aspects of the cultural commons, and in a comparative way on what the techno-scientific/industrial products that people have become dependent upon, brings into the foreground the inescapable nature of how the individual is embedded in multiple levels of relationships and interdependencies.

How does the conduit view of language influence whether embodied relationships are recognized and how does it affect whether the individual accepts responsibility for intellectual accountability and moral reciprocity? If words are accepted as having a universal meaning, rather than being context dependent, does this contribute to the individual being more susceptible to propaganda and an Orwellian political discourse? These questions, using age-level appropriate examples, can be introduced in the early grades by using the concept-shaping language that appears in textbooks and on the computer screen as examples. They can also be introduced at the university level where an historical perspective as well as differences in ideologies can be discussed.

The last essay contained a list of cultural commons activities, with each item on the list having many different forms of expression and depth of knowledge and skill. Each of these areas, whether in the areas of food, creative arts, craft knowledge and skill, democratic traditions, is under the constant pressure of enclosure—that is, being transformed from an intergenerationally connected and largely non-monetized activity into a product or service

that requires participating in a money economy that is both environmentally destructive and increasingly unreliable as corporations downsize and outsource. In the case of our traditions of democracy and civil liberties, the process of enclosure is resulting in an increasingly authoritarian political system that relies upon surveillance, the increasing threat of being labeled as a threat to society, and loss of a checks and balance system of government. Learning the history of this aspect of our cultural commons as well as the history of the ideological and economic forces that lie behind this gathering force will also contribute to empowering people, as well as their commitment to local communities, peace, and democracy.

In effect, every form of participation in the cultural and environmental commons--regardless of cultural group and rural, suburban, and urban setting—can be made the focus of what needs to be critically examined. In some instances, aspects of the cultural commons will be found to be in need of radical change, and in other instances there will be aspects of the techno-scientific based industrial culture that will be found to be beneficial to the life of the community—and essential to lowering the human impact on natural systems.

Chet Bowers is the author of 19 books that address the cultural roots of the ecological crises, as well as the educational reforms that must be undertaken in order to reduce the human impact on natural systems while at the same time strengthening mutual support and self-reliance within communities. Three new online books are available as part of the cultural commons can be found at <http://cabowers.net/>. Or just type C. A. Bowers in Google and then go to Homepage. Additional essays will appear in future months on the blog, which can be accessed by going to <www.spiritualprogressives.org/>
