

Eclipsing the Conditioning of Colonial Modernity: Soul-Based Learning as a Practice of Living Mythology in Transgressive Learning

Injairu Kulundu-Bolus, PhD, Senior Lecturer, Environmental Learning Research Centre, Rhodes University, South Africa
l.kulundu@ru.ac.za, injairu@sheddingskins.co.za

Summary

In a world marked by separation, where the conditioning to forsake our own souls for external expectations runs deep, decolonizing the soul as an educational project remains an elusive yet pertinent foray for experimentation. This think piece explores soul-based learning as a radical act of reclaiming the essence of our being and cultivating a transgressive practice of desire and potentiality within the heart of colonial modernity.

Keywords

Soul-based learning
 Transgressive learning
 Subconscious
 Colonial modernity
 Programming

Introduction: An Educational Trajectory for Emancipation from Within

Despite the many crises we face in education, the idea that we are going to make our way out of this polycrisis through new processes of educational enculturation continues to persist. We see this in the ways mainstream educational processes continue to insist on opening up new forays of what needs to be taught or what we need to know to show up differently in the world. What remains out of view in this perspective is a more personal and nuanced understanding of the kind of education that inspires radical reclamation of the *essence of our being* or what this think piece conceptualises as the *soul* as the foundation for transformative holistic education. This perspective sees as important the spiritual concept of sovereignty, which takes seriously the need to champion education approaches that help “clear the soul of the societal conditioning that predates, controls” consumes and commodifies our desires in degenerative ways (Kulundu-Bolus, 2023, p. 15). This entails starting somewhere else in our quest for social and ecological transformation. It is about tending to the health of our internal landscapes as the deepest barometer of what we can sustainably create in the world. Bhaskar substantiates the need for personal transformation to come to the fore of emancipatory educational purposes by stating the following:

The traditional political standpoint has assumed that it is possible to impose emancipation or freedom from without, externally heteronomously... it can only come from within, it can only be a self-emancipation ...without a standpoint orientated to radical self- transformation any socialist or any other emancipatory project will merely replace or displace one set of master- slave relations with another. (Bhaskar, 2002, p. 222)

This think piece explores novel pedagogical approaches in interrupting the “colonization of the unconscious,” a concept that helps us understand how our most intimate subconscious

renderings often run based on programming that we have received through intergenerational colonial imprinting (Andreotti, 2022). It further challenges the idea that the only worthy education ought to follow the prescripts of “discursive intellectualisation” or even “dialogic consensus-building” toward more experimental forays that foreground the soul as a precept for other ways of working (Andreotti, 2022). More is said on the limits of the discursive intellect as a model for social and ecological transformation:

The very concept of the discursive intellect can no longer be identified with purely formal analytical thought. It must be extended to include dialectical thought, in which concepts are stretched, teased and distanced, as in metaphor or poetry, so as to bring thought into line with a new or deeper level of reality. (Bhaskar, 2002, p. 134)

The power of working with metaphor as a grounding, nuanced, and liberatory principle in transgressive learning will be explored in greater detail here, highlighting the affordances this way of working offers us by bringing us into direct relationship with the experience that our very souls are entangled in. This work has the ability to give us a deeper and different sense of what reality consists of beyond the pervasive presets we inherit in the overculture.

Exploring the Possibilities of Soul-Based Learning

Soul-based learning, also known as “soul-based coaching,” is a feminine, spiritually grounded pedagogical approach that deepens our relationship with all of life (Van Heldingsen, 2024). It challenges us to see everyday life and the challenges therein as metaphorically saturated. Meister Eckhart intimated that when the soul wants something to be known, she throws out an image in front of her and steps into it (Eckhart, 2009). The work of soul-based learning is a deep foray that steps into the metaphors and gestures that the soul throws out in an exploratory embodied way. The present work is a branch of the experimental work initiated by David Grove a renegade psycho-therapist who incorporated his native understanding of Māori ways of being to produce ways of working he termed “emergent knowledge.” Emergent knowledge is a theory of self-discovery that facilitates an individual’s exploration into their inner landscapes of their mind, body, and soul (Wilson, 2017). It is a theory of self-discovery that advocates for the “integration of spiritual and emancipatory social quests through an embodied feminine approach to the sacred and the soul” (Gradle, 2007, p. 1501). The power and reliance of metaphor as a navigational tool in transgressive learning is highlighted within this way of working through understanding that, when we begin to recognize and uncover everyday events as “metaphorically saturated,” our sense of ownership and conscious relationship with all of life deepen (Shantz, 1999, p. 65). In doing so, it taps into the ecosophical experience of wholeness

that underpins the African philosophical concept of *botho* or humanness. In the following, more is said on how *botho* links with the perspective of a saturated relationship with life:

The human organism is included in [the] unfolding process of evolution. Through auto-poetic activity the human being is constantly interacting with its environment, with nature in pursuit of ‘self-preservation’ ... the pursuit of ‘self-preservation’ is simultaneously a direct or indirect, immediate or meditated...preservation of the universe as a wholeness. In this process, the human being everywhere and at all times gains new insights into nature and also makes new discoveries. As a result, old forms of lifestyle might be totally abandoned or modified. (Ramose, 1996, p.100).

Here, Ramose gives us insight into the movement, discovery, and sense of becoming at the heart of the philo-praxis of *botho*. Adding the lens of metaphor to the auto-poetic movement and discovery that a human soul is undergoing in their being and becoming enables us to better apprehend the often-unnoticed subconscious forays and how these interactions are part of our relationship with the world. Thus, a focus on metaphorically embodied knowledge helps one develop a deeper sense of relational capacity that shifts as we come to invoke and embody what has surpassed, that which is ongoing, as well as that which “we would like to have happen” (Van Heldingsen, 2024). This is about opening new portals for the choices that we can make without dissolving into the often-abstracted notions of “agency” that can have the soporific effect of cancelling out the vital internal dimensions of movement, saturation, and impetus needed to authentically move in integrity out here in the world. In this way, “paying attention to gestural images and impulses as articulations of interior spaces and desire” creates incredibly authentic portals of learning that get to the heart of each individual’s situated experience, what they have reason to value, and emergent insights into what their ecosystem needs to reconcile itself with a greater whole. Here, the task for the educator or the coach in each instance is one of re-visioning or “(re)stor(y)ing” a language of image and metaphor as a living mythology of consciousness (Gradle, 2007; Vallabh, 2022). This sense of a living mythology is critical when one apprehends the often overdrawn subconscious moral systems and traumatised metaphorical landscapes we use to describe what is happening in the world. Meaningfully traversing the metaphoric landscape that each individual holds challenges us to step out of a closed degenerative story of life and into the shifting ground of our own unfolding relational capacity. Here, the infinite possibilities of our chosen trajectories can recover and percolate as a signal of our psychic health. As the lyric in the song *wide awake* suggests:

*There will always be,
somewhere to start.
Some inkling of yourself,
that you can trace,
Some inner phase
that must be transcended,
Some part of yourself
you've been waiting to face.*
(Kulundu- Bolus, 2020, p.338.)

This kind of rich embodied metaphorical “(re)stor(y)ing” has recently come to be understood in its capacity to create the changes that we long for in educational process (Vallabh, 2022). Here, the good news of neuro-plasticity gives us a different way of thinking about what can assist and strengthen our educational efforts in substantive ways:

Neuroplasticity is the incredible ability of the brain to change throughout our lives. It's the fact that every time we learn or do something new, our brain changes.... We can take agency over this to expand our horizons... rather than reinforcing the negative narrative inner subconscious brain. Repetition and emotional intensity are key to creating lasting changes in our brain. (Swart, 2023)

The new synapses connected through intense and repetitive, embodied, and metaphorical “(re)stor(y)ing” that soul-based learning generates warms up the neuroplasticity of the brain to actualise new pathways aligned with what one desires to have happen. This practice is a slow and strong way to step into new ways of being within and without that can shape the world toward a future that is worthy of our longing (Rushdie, 1997). As one continues to accept this kind of cocreative role with reality, as one sees to believe that they can indeed participate in the great orchestra of life, the conscious choices that one makes can better gravitate toward visions beyond the spell of separation composed by colonial modernity. My contention is that this process takes time and consistency. It takes time to disrupt the hold that subconscious programming has on us toward being able to actively live into a different version of reality that exceeds haunting threats of scarcity and limitation. It begins with the will to establish one's capacity to cocreate reality. It can continue to build the sensibilities to perceive and lean into that which will serve the greater whole much more intentionally.

Soul-based learning gives us the opportunity to begin this journey by honouring the deep metaphorical forays each individual is traversing. Slowly undergoing the heart of that living mythology can recreate one's relationship with life. This work zooms into a nuanced experience of what it means to be human for each situated individual, touching on ways of knowing that are tender, personal, and potent while also signalling trajectories for a greater sense of our belonging in

the world with human and nonhuman connections.

Some grounded ways with which one can begin this work is by considering the words we use to describe a particularly heightened situation that is perplexing. For example, imagine that someone describes a situation as “tight.” One could slowly start to provoke the metaphorical landscape that is ensconced in their experience.¹ Here are some clean questions you could ask someone or even facilitate yourself as you try to invoke the metaphorical landscape that best embraces the experience: What kind of tight is that tight? And is there anything else about tight? Does tight have a size or a shape? And where is tight? What would tight like to have happen? These questions and many other clean questions that are chronicled in Carol Wilson's (2017) comprehensive archive of the work of David Grove have the potential to open up a whole odyssey of experience and trajectories that begin to unravel the gifts and openings that this experimental way of working may hold.

Endnote

1. Clean questions are very open questions that invite whoever is doing the asking to stay out of the way of the meaning making and allow the person who is journeying to really color in their own interpretation and gradually step into their metaphorical landscape without anyone imposing their thoughts on them.

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