

12

C H A P T E R

The Right Moment

Answering the Call

*You must give birth to your images.
They are the future waiting to be born.
Fear not the strangeness you feel.
The future must enter you long before it happens.
Just wait for the birth, for the hour of new clarity.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929)

SOMETIMES THERE ARE MOMENTS IN HUMAN history that seem to beckon awakenings. They perturb us to reevaluate our beliefs, assumptions, and reigning cultural stories. They challenge us to synthesize and integrate seemingly disparate forms of knowledge into new relationships, new patterns, and new theories. They invite us to invent new language, new rules, and new structures. They call us to create and live into new stories of possibility. These moments grace us with enlightened insights and more soulful understanding. They fill us with wonder and amazement. They open us to

186 The Power to Transform

life and to the invitation to reclaim the fire and light that reside within us all to change the world.

The ancient Greeks called this time *kairos*, the “right moment.”¹ It is a time of awakening. It is a time of radical changes in perceptions, imagery, and stories. It is a time when reality embraces possibility. I believe we are in such a moment. It is now our time to author a radical new story of learning and schooling that will create decidedly different minds for the future now waiting to be born.²

At this time of *kairos*, we are morally charged to ask ourselves: What does it mean to be fully human? Which qualities of the human mind, heart, and spirit must be nurtured if we are to create a global civilization worthy of the light that resides within us? What might we learn and dream together? How shall we live? Do we wish to be conquerors, consumers, or stewards? How shall we reconnect to the web of life to which we belong?

We live with escalating social, economic, and educational injustices and with sobering and unsustainable paradoxes. Increasing knowledge and economic growth for some can coexist with increasing ignorance and devastating poverty for many. And although we have the structural, technological, and scientific knowledge and tools and the financial and political resources to restore balance to our wounded world, we seem paralyzed, afraid, or simply unwilling to do so. Ill-conceived, nonsystemic, and partial solutions become predictably mired in political and economic bureaucracies, institutional inertia, arrogant considerations of self-interest, and unbridled, ethically imperiled, and publicly licensed greed and consumption.

We can no longer pretend that knowledge acquisition, economic growth, and material progress disconnected from the web of life and the values of the commonweal inevitably result in prosperity for all, advance the human condition, or protect and preserve the natural world. There is a holistic, integrative, and morally wise context for our thinking and our behavior, and it resides within the songline of life in learning.

I believe that the interlocking complexities of our escalating global problems currently seem to elude or defy resolution not because they are too complex but because our thinking lacks an integral and wise context. We are not used to thinking in the holistic, systemic, imaginative, and connected ways essential for shared discernment and prob-

lem resolution. Although we are born with an innate capacity to think, act, and create in integral ways, there is a profound disconnect between the minds needed to imagine and create a sustainable and just world and the reductive, competitive, and isolated minds currently being developed and rewarded in our society and our schools.

The stakes have never been higher and the possibilities never greater. It is my belief that the quality of our children's growing minds is not commensurate with the enlightened leadership required in the twenty-first century. A world dominated by excessively competitive and acquiring minds who cannot think holistically, systemically, long term, and wisely is dangerous. It is our responsibility to nurture the growth of integral minds and ground our leadership, learning, and schooling in the principles of life and learning. The power of our minds must transcend the power of our might. These disquieting words of Vaclav Havel remain a stirring wake-up call: "Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our Being as humans."³

We now need leaders who reconnect us and our systems to life—who evoke spirit, invite soul, and liberate the fullness of our community's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual potentials. We can no longer pretend that our interior lives are separate from the "real world" and our rigorous pursuit of deep learning. Our system of schooling has lost its connection to deep learning, and this estrangement has severed its ability to evoke the wholeness, meaning, connectedness, and creativity our children so desperately seek. This enormous hunger for a transcendent story of meaning, purpose, and belonging is not being fed in the old places. To unleash the genius, goodness, creativity, and wisdom of our children and our systems and increase their individual and collective knowledge, vibrancy, inventiveness, and shared sense of purpose, we must be engaged in new work. Our system's capacity for reflection, exploration, imagination, and connectedness depends on the conditions we create by design, that enable life and deep learning to flourish.

It is time to let go of our false ideas about school system change and move from believing we can control change to delighting in the idea that we cannot. Our work as leaders is not to prescribe, but to evoke and liberate—to create generative conditions for deep learning

188 The Power to Transform

by design that embody the creative processes of life and learning and invite our children to astonish us.

THINK WISELY *and* ACT BOLDLY

Our exhausted and malnourished world cries out for enlightened leaders who know we must reconnect schooling to the deeper, more holistic, connected, and creative songline of life in learning. To do so requires that we create natural learning environments by design.

Can there be any doubt that the fullness of our humanity and the sustainability of our planet rest with the transformation of human consciousness and the emergence of decidedly different minds that can think anew?

This book is a call to your leadership. It is a call to stir and engage the fullness of your attention and desire to think and act differently, capture the depth and breadth of your imagination and courage, reclaim and amplify your voice, and put your name on cocreating a holistic, interconnected, and wise story of learning and schooling in harmony with life and the human spirit. It is this radical new story that can liberate the goodness and genius of our children for the world. It is this integral and wise story that can reweave humanity's fragmentation and bring our children's learning back to life.

Calls are not initially about strategy. They are about possibility. They are not about how to do something; they are about what to say yes to. They are not about rationality; they are about resonance. A call is about embracing our soul's voice and work and coming home to rejoin and belong once again, to our own life.

Our children are born to learn—to question, risk, wonder, generate new knowledge, seek and forge connections, creatively explore the mysteries of life, and imaginatively participate in world making. They are born scientists, mathematicians, musicians, writers, scientists, artists, poets, dancers, philosophers, inventors, pioneers, and explorers. They are also social and spiritual beings. Deep learning—learning that nourishes the deepest roots of all of who we are and invites, energizes, and integrates all our natural potentials and ways of knowing—is the kind of learning essential for our children to fully belong to and creatively and wisely engage in the world.

OUR CHILDREN NEED WISE MIND
MAKERS *and* SOUL GUIDES

G. K. Chesterton once observed, “Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.”⁴ Most people believe that it is education that will save us. But this bland, sweeping, and unexamined assertion reduces us into continuing to uncritically support and tinker with the current story of schooling. It is education that will save us, but not *any* kind of education—only education of a certain kind: only education that is generative and life affirming; that invites, engages, and integrates the fullness of our children’s capacities and ways of knowing; and that nurtures the creation of integral minds committed to the creation of a truly just and wise global civilization. Only education that develops our capacity to become more fully human is truly worthy of the human spirit. Only education that invites deep learning and reconnects us to life will light and sustain the fire within.

Our children are yearning for healthy, meaning-filled engagement with adults. They seek genuine mentors—real mind makers and soul guides who can authentically challenge and engage them in discovering and developing their voices and gifts and can create genuine practice fields for their work in the world. They do not want to be marginalized, patronized, or thought not yet ready. They want to be seen and heard as serious learners, participating freely in and belonging fully to their communities because they share in its important and complex work. It is their engagement with us that will create meaning and enable our children to participate with discipline, imagination, and passion in advancing the human condition and sustaining the global home in which we live.

Our children want to learn and engage in lives of meaning, purpose, connection, and contribution while they are still young. They do not want to be held in a state of suspended animation until we think they are ready to become visible and active in the world. Moreover, the world is not served by keeping them physically sequestered and cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually disengaged for so long. Our children don’t want to be passive observers in their own learning. They want to be in the center with us, bringing their own talents and

190 The Power to Transform

stories to life—and the world needs their energy, passion, and creative commitment now more than ever before.

WE CAN CREATE LEARNING HABITATS
THAT ARE NATURALLY RIGHT

We can design natural and nourishing learning habitats for our children. We can design environments that invite and integrate their deepest thinking, curiosity, imagination, creativity, and passionate pursuit of possibilities. And we must. We cannot lose another generation to the old story.

Too many children emerge from schooling very clear about what they cannot do, but few emerge with an evolving clarity about their own efficacy as learners and their capacities for unique contributions to the world. Our children are eager to engage with us in reimagining our collective future. We must enable them to develop the integral and wise habits of mind to do so. As elders, we must teach our children to hear and sing the deeper song.