

Interview with David K. Scott

I understand that you have been involved with the Community for Integrative Learning & Action (CILA). Can you tell us about the work of CILA, its purposes and programs?

CILA (The Community for Integrative Learning & Action) grew out of ongoing activities at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and within the Five-College Consortium- the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Hampshire College, Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, and Amherst College. It was also responsive to developments taking place nationally and internationally that were generally seeking more integrative and spiritual approaches to learning, life and work. So, over a period of three or four years, we launched a series of activities and events that drew a tremendous amount of interest, and subsequently we created the Community for Integrative Learning and Action as a structure to support the activities.

There was a faculty seminar, called "New Epistemologies and Contemplation," created by Frederique Apffel-Marglin and Arthur Zajonc that brought a group of over seventy faculty together, who were interested in incorporating contemplative practice and meditation in their classes as one aspect of a new epistemology. They were exploring other ways of knowing in the curriculum, beyond the strictly rational, analytical, differentiated approaches that are common and, of course, important to learning. An intriguing aspect of the group is the diversity of disciplines, including a strong representation from the natural sciences. In the surveys conducted through your Templeton Project on Spirituality in Higher Education, science and engineering often come out as areas with the least inclination to the spiritual and interior life. We think our CILA group is unusual in this regard. As I shall mention later in fact it is the sciences that should have a leadership role in this movement!

We also invited Jon Kabat-Zinn to the campus to talk about contemplative practices, meditation, and mindfulness in the context of epistemology. Over a thousand students came to the meeting-an unusual occurrence for an evening seminar. They listened intently as he spoke about epistemology and science, the birth of modern science in the 17th century, and more recent discoveries of modern science, combined it with an experiential, contemplative component. You could have heard a pin drop during the one and a half hours. So, it indicated to

us that there was a real interest amongst students and a yearning for something missing in the university experience.

We also held some sessions on meditation and contemplative practice for building a more resilient work-place environment. Kabat-Zinn also conducted these sessions along the lines of the clinic at the University of Massachusetts Worcester on stress reduction using mindfulness and meditation. Although the event was supposed to be limited to fewer than two hundred people, there was so much interest, particularly among staff that we had to allow 300 to come. What I'm trying to illustrate here with these examples is that faculty, students and staff expressed a tremendous interest in exploring more integrative approaches to learning and action. At its core this integration is connected with a more spiritual, connected experience.

CILA will provide an ordered, structural framework for these ongoing activities as well as placing the disparate activities in theoretical framework. We believe our work will also be useful to what is occurring nationally. AACU (the Association of American Colleges and Universities) speaks of a new approach to liberal learning for the 21st Century, framed under the rubric of integrative learning. There is also a growing movement nationally, related to spirituality in higher education as your project is revealing and clarifying. And there is an exploration of contemplative practice in higher education, particularly through the Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, directed by Mirabai Bush here in Western Massachusetts, which has been very helpful in our own work with CILA. But it seems to us that these different movements are taking place almost on parallel tracks right now. You have the integrative learning movement, the spirituality movement, and the contemplative practice movement. We think all of these movements should be very closely connected. So, through CILA we're also interested in trying to network nationally with other colleges and universities interested in these approaches. In summary I would say that CILA has three components: (1) developing a coherent epistemology; (2) organizational development; and finally, (3) personal transformation-it is unlikely we will see much significant change epistemologically and organizationally if we do not also change individually to be less fragmented in our being in the world.

You have been concerned with the fragmentation in higher education and the need for a theory of integrative consciousness that can inform our teaching and learning practices and our scholarly work. Could you address some of these issues for our readers?

Yes, there is a great deal of fragmentation. It's curious because higher education in the United States has always been concerned with integration. For example we value combining liberal learning with specialized learning or the related melding of general education with professional, specialized education in the major. This striving for integration has been important in American higher education for a very long time and is unique to the United States. The creation of

land grant universities in the middle of the 19th century connected learning with the practical applications of knowledge in the service of society, leading to the “trilogy of ingenuity” in American higher education, the interconnection or integration of teaching, research, and service. Then there were the revolutions of the 1960’s to make colleges and universities more inclusive, more integrative by providing access to people who had been historically excluded. Today we are also seeing many colleges and universities modify their admissions criteria to recognize not only rational, analytical and cognitive intelligence, but also ability to overcome hardship, leadership skills, social service and teamwork. All these are implicit attempts to recognize the importance of emotional-even spiritual-intelligences. It represents another integrative movement. An integration of learning across the lifespan is another recognized transformative dimension of learning. This practice of integration in learning was probably introduced explicitly in 1855 by Spencer in the *Principles of Psychology*. William James developed the idea, but used quotes around “integration,” indicating that the word did not still have current use in educational and psychological writing. By 1930 many articles on integration in education were appearing, while by mid 20th Century, theoretical work by Jean Gebser created a theoretical framework for integral thinking as the next stage in the evolution of consciousness. We are now seeing acceleration in synthesizing all these different strands that have been implicit in American higher education from the beginning.

But at the same time, we have this fragmentation and specialization going on, so that different disciplines are isolated from one another. We try to overcome that by creating interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary centers and institutes. Still, basically, the structure of the university is framed around these various disciplines. This creates the fragmentation we now speak of today. We also have fragmentation across different components of the university and college with academic affairs and student life, between faculty, staff, and students. Often there is also cultural fragmentation. The fragmentation that exists in knowledge seems to have mapped itself onto the fragmentation that we have in the more general structure of our organizations.

The challenge, I think, for integrative learning and action is not to eliminate the **differentiation** (probably not possible nor desirable), but to try and overcome what has been called the “**disassociation**” of different components of an organization or of knowledge. Some differentiation is important. For example, the differentiation that occurs between science and religion, going back two hundred years, was important because prior to that it was difficult for scientists to look through a telescope and not run foul of some church doctrine, as Ken Wilber has observed. Similarly, we find this with art and religion. Wilber has called these three knowledge areas of art, science and religion the Kantian Big Three. We had to differentiate the knowledge spheres-part of the Enlightenment project- but in the evolution of our universities and colleges, we’ve created a disassociation where they are totally separated and fragmented from one another. Wilber draws an analogy with the human body where there is great differentiation

between the molecules, the cells of the body, and the organism. At the same time, there is this holistic integration so that the body also works remarkably as one unit. I think we have to use this model in higher education to deal with this differentiation.

I'd like to conclude my comments on your question by remarking in greater detail on the transformations that have occurred throughout history because it perhaps makes it easier to see that another major transformation is not out of the question! If we go back to early societies, they actually had a very unitive cosmology, with no great distinctions between religion, art and science-the three key strands in every society throughout history- between God, matter, and the spirit. Everything was connected. But then a change occurred during the Axial Age, where it was decided that matter and the spirit should be separated from one another. This new dualistic view of reality originated with religion and drastically influenced epistemology and the structure of knowledge. Furthermore, spirit was elevated in importance over matter. Fast forwarding now to the birth of modern science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this period of scientific discovery reinforced the split between spirituality and matter. However, the priority in this duality was reversed- the material world was made more important than the spiritual. Thus religion and science both conspired in our fall from an integrative worldview! This has been our understanding for several hundred years. Now we are led to a new search guided by this history and evolution- not for a return to a unitive cosmology, but rather to move toward an integrative cosmology where one can reconnect those things that have been differentiated, yet connect them at a higher level because of the deep knowledge that we have in various areas of knowledge. In retrospect, this long revolution might appear to be an unfortunate detour. However, it was probably necessary in order to see how to reconnect matter and spirit at a deeper foundational level, rather than the unexamined unity of earlier societies.

We may think of the evolution like the spirals on the surface of a sphere in the drawing by Escher. At one pole we see the strands of the spirals diverging from a point of unity. The strands could represent: matter, mind and spirit; science, art and religion; cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, kinesthetic intelligences -or any other set of the various dimensions and characteristics we have succeeded in fragmenting through our rational, analytical, cognitive worldview. They diverge to become differentiated or even dissociated, to re-converge at the other pole in an integral worldview. These spirals on a sphere are the symbols we have chosen as the logo for CILA. They represent an upward evolution but also a return to the wisdom of the world's spiritual traditions with a different level of insight gleaned from all the research and knowledge of history.

I think this has implications for many, many different areas of knowledge and, by extension, higher education. I sometimes feel that we're on the verge of a new transformation that might be comparable to the kind of transformation which took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the western world;

a revolution which led to a separation between mind and body. It also led to a view of a universe that exists, quite independently of individual consciousness and the mind. We at CILA are also very interested in new discoveries that are taking place in many different areas of knowledge, physics, neuroscience, or health for example, which are pointing out that the duality of the external and the interior is actually no longer valid.

There is a different kind of model merging at the theoretical level. CILA wants to connect that theoretical model to the many activities that we see occurring inside our own institutions and also in other social institutions as we described earlier. For example, the development of community service learning serves as a connection between academic learning and the exterior world. Another example is the use of capstone courses connecting the different strands of knowledge that a student experiences in four years. My sense is that these various isolated activities are all moving us in this new and more integrative direction. The question is whether we are on the verge of a larger transformation that can bring everything together in a coherent structured fashion. This is why I think the Templeton HERI project on spirituality is so exciting. The tentative findings from the project have told us that some 75% of current college students are trying to figure out how to make their experience more connected, integrative and spiritual. Once students latch onto a new direction or transformation, they become a very powerful force for change. I think the HERI study will become very important once it documents this very broad interest because students have always been a powerful force in bringing about societal change and transformation historically in the United States. Based upon the HERI study and what's already being publicized through the newsletter and reports, the momentum is building. For instance, the Fetzer Institute is interested in bringing presidents and chancellors of various universities and colleges together sometime next year to discuss what this kind of approach would mean for their institutions. We should see a tipping point soon where spirituality and integrative learning and action become a transformative movement.

What role does contemplation play in student learning? How do you envision its practice?

I'm not a great expert in contemplative practice in higher education myself. Although I would not say I have had an explicit meditation practice, implicitly I've always had a spiritual world view which probably came from growing up on a small island surrounded on all sides by the majestic forces of nature-the storms at sea, the aurora borealis, the stars at night. This led to my becoming a scientist with an interest in spiritual experiences. I did not see a separation as a boy and I do not now.

After leaving administration three years ago, I have done some teaching again. Through these experiences I've had to think more concretely about the role that contemplative practice can play in learning compared to the emphasis

on the exterior, normally found in the classroom. In the last class I taught, there were about one hundred and twenty students or so. They would come into the classroom pretty restive and there would be a lot of noise. I found that if I announced at the beginning of the class that there would two minutes for quietness and reflection in order to focus upon the present moment-- this class, this room-- it had a very powerful effect on the class for the rest of the hour. I've found that the same is true of meetings. If we begin with a period of reflection and quiet, it actually sets a different tone, more peaceful and less combative, and changes the dynamics of the meeting. This is a very simple thing that one can do.

At a more sophisticated level, a contemplative experience can influence the learning environment. Usually in a classroom we abhor silence. Almost as if silence should be likened to failure as teachers and as students. So if there is a discussion period, there will be some people who invariably shoot up their hands and those who are more reticent. I discovered in a little experiment that, by offering a moment of quiet reflection at the beginning of class, students kind of got accustomed to the idea that silence is quite alright. We don't actually need to talk all the time. It's perfectly natural to be quiet and to reflect on what has been said. I found that those who asked questions directly after the period of reflection were often the students least likely to speak in a direct solicitation for discussion. So, it illustrates the power of contemplative practice as a simple pedagogical tool.

Beyond these simple techniques, contemplative practice needs to be studied through courses on the history and the role it has played in the world's spiritual traditions. While we tend to associate meditation and contemplative practice with Buddhist philosophies more than say Christianity, in fact they are important in all spiritual traditions. The practices present a systematic method for training and attuning the mind to heightened states of awareness and consciousness--surely a valuable component of all learning. Greater attention, awareness, clarity of mind, and greater consciousness will surely serve us well in all fields of knowledge. However, I think one also needs to study it as a subject as well as to practice it as an activity. We could also engage in some pilot experiments. For instance the subject of quantum mechanics is not easy to understand, either for experts or students. So one could do some controlled experiments, where one section might use contemplative methods to understand the deeper foundational aspects of the subject in a way that might be better, or faster, or more efficient than a class working in a more traditional way.

I also realize that in talking about contemplative practice, meditation, and spirituality in these ways, we frame the integrative pedagogical task as a means to an end, or perhaps a form of technology. There is a danger because it can diminish the role of spirituality in developing the interior life that students may be seeking. However, I also think it is a good way to begin. People worry about spirituality in the academy because of the religious overtones, particularly in the case of the public university. For most, such blurring is not seen as permissible.

That is why I think that it is important to study contemplative practice as an academic subject while also practicing it. This form of praxis removes it from the immediate association with a particular religion. Realistically we cannot avoid the religious issues. The fact is that, while we refer to contemplative and meditative practices a lot in this secular way now, much of our insight and information about it came from the religious traditions of the world over hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. I don't think we can simply dispense with that history just because new discoveries are indicating that connectedness is an intrinsic part of reality. We are seeing a convergence of scientific and spiritual interpretations of reality, rather than the non-overlapping magisteria of Stephen Gould. No longer is it possible to consider these as separate views, both important but unrelated to one another. We are witnessing a grander synthesis that can only be construed as healthy for the human experience.

Integrative approaches through contemplative practice are also useful in addressing difference and differentiation across cultures, which is central to the mission of the academy. We all bring cultural biases from our different backgrounds and experiences. Such diversity has led to tensions across the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic fault lines. These polarizations persist inside our institutions in spite of intensive efforts to overcome them. In the same way that contemplative practice can bring a deeper awareness and understanding of foundational connections across knowledge boundaries, it can also be a means of opening up greater understanding to issues of racism and social justice. So, while one may continue to recognize the differences of race, ethnicity, social background and so on, contemplative practice can help us to realize the human bond and connectedness we all have in common. Most of our institutions invest enormous resources to this end, whether in the curriculum with special courses on diversity, or in student life. If we can enhance these efforts with the insights that come from meditation and contemplative practice, surely it is worth a try.

What new epistemologies are you envisioning that could transform higher education and our academic work?

I alluded earlier to the discoveries that have taken place in the last fifty years in many areas of knowledge moving us beyond the mechanistic, dualistic model of the western enlightenment and modern science that emphasized a rational, cognitive, analytical approach to knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, it was important for us to disentangle the different areas of knowledge. The tragedy was that knowledge became totally differentiated as Ken Wilber has noted. But the findings of modern quantum mechanics, for example, have implied that there is a profound shift from classical, dualistic paradigms of objectivity and subjectivity, from the notion that our minds are separate from a totally preexisting reality. Objects and observations appear to be entangled with one another and to some extent we, through our consciousness, are involved in the creation of the reality that we have assumed to preexist out there. This leads not to a separation but to an integration of mind and matter, even to an integration of consciousness

with matter. These ideas are, of course, not uniformly accepted by all the sciences, mainly because many scientists do not deal with the philosophical consequences of the theories they work with every day. Karen Barad, one of our colleagues here in the Five Colleges, has thought extensively about the epistemological significance of the emerging views of reality. If we accept this integrative model of reality, as opposed to the dualistic model, it places the human being as the observer in a very different relationship with the universe. It makes it less easy, I think, to separate the boundaries between nature, culture, and the human observer. It maps back onto the fact that spiritual and material reality are not actually separated from one another as we assumed for several hundred years within the western world. It also means that our actions are inseparable from being in the world. Over time, this new epistemology will transform our worldview just as the revolution of the seventeenth century did. It will raise ethical issues about our behavior in a world from which we cannot be separated.

This new theoretical understanding of an integral and spiritual worldview will transform how we learn, how we structure the curriculum, how our organizations work. It will bridge the differences between the Eastern Enlightenment, which focused on the interior of the human being, and the Western Enlightenment, which was more concerned with the presumed external world. We may be witnessing a synthesis of the two enlightenments into a third enlightenment. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) recently developed a vision for the future of education worldwide. It is summarized as-Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together, and Learning to Be. In higher education we have focused on the first two components-the exterior dimensions. A new epistemology will help us to include the second two, which are more concerned with the interior spaces, and to see that the four aspects are in reality inseparable.

There are many repercussions for epistemology and for how we work in universities. For example, the dualism found in the separation between the interior and the exterior and between the spiritual and the material is related to the distinctions made between fact and values inside the university. As we assemble facts and study the world, we find everything that we can about it with the ultimate goal of creating through knowledge a better and a wiser world. Yet, in the process of studying and finding out how to make the world a better place, we exclude the world from the agenda. As we break down these boundaries between exterior and internal realities, one also has to explore the boundaries that have been created between facts and values. I think the repercussions are actually enormous. One can only hope that it isn't going to take another three hundred years in order to work this out! This is the larger agenda in which CILA would like to play a part.

A few years ago, when you were Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, you provided leadership for a conference

entitled, “Going Public: Spirituality in Higher Education and the Workplace”. What prompted you to organize and offer such a conference? Can you share with us some of the outcomes that generated from those proceedings?

The conference was held back in 2000. It arose, in part, because of all these activities that I mentioned earlier in our conversation. On a personal level, my interest in these issues arose from my forty plus years in the academy in different roles and from my experiences as a child. I grew up on a very small, isolated, island with a population of one hundred people. It was like living in an early primal culture because we had a kind of unitive cosmology where we didn't separate the sciences, art and religion. Yet, it was an unexamined, cosmology. It was just the way things were. We really didn't think too much about it. When I went away to university, I continued to be influenced by that early experience. I saw that the idea of unity and connectedness was less and less a part of the experience within the university as a student, as a faculty member, and then eventually as an administrator. What I saw was, in fact, increasing separation and polarization in knowledge, in the organizational structure of the university, and in human interactions within these organizations. I really felt that one had to find a way to overcome this fragmentation.

Based upon my experiences as a child, a scientist, and then eventually as an administrator, I felt this fragmentation led to dysfunction within the university. I was also aware that many progressive businesses and corporations were exploring spirituality and greater connectedness. Then I attended a conference at Wellesley College with President Diana Chapman Walsh and the Dean of Religious Life, Victor Kazanjian, on spirituality and higher education called “Education as Transformation.” Later an organization was formed that still exists called the Education as Transformation Project, directed by Victor and Peter Lawrence. I was astonished that 800 people, mainly students, attended the meeting. This participation indicated to me, five to six years ago, that a movement was stirring.

I decided to organize another conference at a public university. Many people felt that there was a great difference between public universities and private colleges in these matters because of the separation of church and state. I believed these roadblocks were really contrived by academic institutions as an excuse for not dealing with spiritual matters. While the Constitution stipulates that we can't foster a particular religion in our public universities and colleges, I don't believe the Framers ever thought we should eliminate a spiritual or religious view under the banner or shield of the Constitution. We didn't know what response there would be to such a conference, but when three hundred and fifty people registered (more would have come had we not limited the attendance), it was clear once again that something was happening out there that colleges and universities must understand if we are to fulfill the stated goals and missions of our institutions. We've always talked about educating the whole person and the

examined life as an important part of the mission of higher education. The question is how well we do it and whether we can do it better. It seems to me that the students want us to do better as indicated by the findings of the HERI/Templeton project. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us as faculty, staff, and administrators to try and facilitate this exploration inside our organizations. There will be a book of essays from the conference published by Peter Lang as part of the series on Education as Transformation, entitled *Integrative Learning and Action: A Call to Wholeness*.

Since the conference on Going Public, there have been other conferences on spirituality in higher education.. It has also become an important agenda topic for many national higher education organizations, such as AAHE, AACU, ACE. I'm glad to be talking to you about this because I think what HERI is doing will provide the validation and the courage for administrators, faculty, and staff to begin to act upon what we all feel in our hearts must be done.

Thank you for speaking with us today Dr. Scott.

Thank you.

David K. Scott was the Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Amherst from 1993 to 2001, prior to which he served in a number of educational and administrative positions at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory at the University of California Berkeley and at Michigan State University, where he was the Provost and Vice president for Academic Affairs, and also the John Hannah Distinguished Professor of Learning, Science and Society. He is now interested in drawing upon his experiences to develop more integrative approaches to learning, life and work. Dr. Scott is currently a member of the National Advisory Board for the Higher Education Research Institute's "Spirituality in Higher Education Project".