

CHAPTER 8

HEALING EDUCATORS TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

“Merely to acquire information is not learning. Learning implies love of understanding and loving something for itself. Only when there is a compulsion can learning be possible, and compulsion adopts many forms. Is this not so? There is compulsion through influence, through attachment and through threats, through persuasive stimulation and subtle ways of recompense....”

— J. Krishnamurti, *The Art of Living*

It is one thing to formulate an educational ideal, and another to transform education, bringing this ideal into life.

It doesn't take much imagination to understand that simply formulating educational policies and curricular reforms would not be likely to change education. Just as life can only arise from life, awareness can only proceed from awareness. Hence, the theme of this chapter: that the key to a renewal of education lies in a renewal of the way in which teachers are educated (and, perhaps the bureaucrats of education as well).

To appreciate such a proposal, one has only to consider what has taken place over the course of the last decade in the area of Values Education in various South American countries, as well as Spain. Until a short time ago, these legislatures had proposed an education in which the explicit “vertical” curriculum would be interwoven with a “horizontal” curriculum contemplating values. This would have allowed teachers who were giving a biology or history class, for example, to simultaneously transmit to their pupils attitudes such as solidarity, peace, or freedom. This Values Education seemed a logical response to the progressive impoverishment of culture in terms of virtues and ideals, and I would call it a very noble proposal. For a while, many believed it to be a genuine solution to education's neglect of humanness. However, this vision may be said to have overlooked the extent to which, for values to actually be transmitted, much more is needed than offering teachers courses on so-called values education.

Can a person who is not cooperative transmit a cooperative spirit? Can a person who is not free teach freedom? “Values” such as solidarity, freedom, peace, or authenticity are facets of

a mind that has matured, and not merely concepts that one has become familiar with after attending certain courses purporting to empower teachers to teach values.

For the ability to transmit values requires not so much specific skills as a transformation of personality, leading the individual from a kind of larval state (the ordinary human condition) to a state of health and plenitude. In the language of transpersonal psychology, this transformation involves a relative dis-identification from the ego, which in turn allows the release of the person's essential being.

Fortunately, what today's educators need in order to improve their ability to teach values coincides with what they need as human beings, though, unfortunately, they seem not to know it, so that even when something truly useful to their growth were offered to them (overloaded as they are, and all too familiar with courses that have contributed little or nothing to their own welfare or true development) they probably would perceive it as simply one more opportunity for job advancement.

Teachers from the majority of Western countries are depressed, and many suffer from psychosomatic illnesses; but mainly, they are unmotivated, and only by nurturing their emotional life,^{1*} I am convinced, could we help them regain their desire to help others. For this reason, the "improvement courses" they need are not those that have been included or known so far within traditional pedagogy. Rather, we find the relevant ingredients among the teachings of the wisdom traditions, as well as those relevant to the preparation of psychotherapists.

What teachers really need is a predominantly *experiential* school, which teaches them the vital and necessary work involved in overcoming destructive attitudes and thus cultivating the higher emotions and virtues: a school for self-knowledge and for the work of dis-identification from the conditioned personality. For only such a process might guide our future teachers towards the discovery of their true being, which is the true fountain of values and virtues.

Just as academia has been critical of spirituality, so the educational establishment has been critical of therapies. And since most people today are neither concerned with sinfulness nor open to the notion of being emotionally imbalanced or disturbed (which they arrogantly dismiss)

* I am sure that the discontent of educators—at times so difficult for them to explain, themselves—is the result of having to sell themselves on a task that fails to provide a true service to their pupils. We all need to feel that we are useful for something; and as much as we try to fool ourselves into succumbing to a systemic deceit, we languish when our lives objectively lack meaning.

there is little demand for a process that would guide them towards what they so much need: overcoming the “passions” or emotional obstructions, and cultivating emotional health.

Yet not only teachers, but social welfare needs it, and only a school for self-knowledge that teaches the work of dis-identification with the personality constructed in childhood could open up our future educators to the discovery of their true being, which they are unconsciously seeking and their students are unconsciously missing.

Teachers, more than anyone, need an experiential complement to the present scientific, humanistic, and pedagogical curriculum; a novel curriculum that would comprise self-knowledge, interpersonal repair, and a spiritual culture based on lived experience (and thus free from dogmatism).

Assuming that those interested in finding such experiential curricula and methods will be happy to know that this is precisely what I have to offer (after four decades of continuous exploration) I will in the rest of this chapter describe the evolution of my work with groups—work that is now beginning to be applied to the training of teachers in Chile, Cataluña, Brazil, Italy and Mexico.

An accurate explanation of my work would be incomplete without my saying something about its history, and since it would be also incomplete if I did not also mention its *inner* source, I will begin by saying that this flowed from a profound spiritual experience that was, for me, the culmination of a year-long pilgrimage which divided my life into a “before” and an “after.”

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In 1970, I came into contact with Oscar Ichazo, who said he was a representative of a mysterious school to which Gurdjieff had referred in his autobiography and with which many disciples of Gurdjieff had yearned to come into contact. To make a long story short, I will just say that Ichazo sent me out into the desert near Arica, in the north of Chile, with instructions for a forty-day-long retreat that would serve as a context for a “transmission of consciousness.” He guaranteed that in this retreat I would not only find what I was looking for, but would also know the answer to my doubts about following his guidance any further, and what followed was a multi-faceted experience of greater depth than I had conceived until then, despite my familiarity with a number of the sacred texts of the world.

At the heart of the experience—beyond specifics such as the awakening of the *kundalini* and a sort of alchemical process in the interior of my body—seemed to be an emptying of myself through which everything else seemed to occur; a self-emptying that was like the eye of an inner transformative cyclone and the motor or vehicle of an inner voyage that led to a spiritual birth: the beginning of a second life that I can call the “path” proper, after years of seeking and preparation.

Months later, when I came to Santiago to visit my mother, she was so impressed by my transformation that she wanted to follow in my footsteps; and this became for me the incentive for bringing together a small group. Among its members were earlier Gestalt trainees, friends, and friends of my mother, and we gathered together every day during a period of two months before my return to Berkeley, where I had settled years earlier. In the course of this time, I learned that I could teach in a way that integrated earlier apprenticeships with a new inspiration, and mostly I learnt to trust this inner guidance.

On returning to Berkeley, my first American group was formed. It also occurred almost spontaneously, after a visit to the psychology department of the University of California, where I had been invited to teach months earlier, and where I was scheduled to speak about Esoteric Christianity. Although I had already considered the idea of teaching, in my mind it was limited to gathering together a small group of seeker-friends. I did not imagine that very soon I would be coming into contact with a great many people previously unknown to me—many of whom had heard me at my U.C. talk, or had met me at a summer program offered at Stanford University, in response to the joint initiatives of Idries Shah’s current representative (Bob Ornstein) and Esalen Institute.

The gatherings that took place for the next three years had a seminal influence in California at a time when it was still the Mecca of the New Age, though only later would the name “SAT” and the official presentation of my work come, when it was suggested that—considering the large number of participants and the fees involved—it would be convenient to create an Institute. A lawyer whose house we contemplated buying spontaneously offered to take care for us of the necessary paperwork toward the establishment of a non-profit educational organization; and since a name had to be given to it, I chose “*Seekers After Truth*,” whose initials form the word SAT. Also, in addition to being the Sanskrit word for “truth” and “being,” the

letters SAT seemed a good phonetic symbol of the trinitarian vision that always inspired my work.^{2*}

In terms of content, this original SAT was an improvisation, yet an improvisation based on a structural vision.

Firstly, I knew that I would want to bring together spirituality and psychotherapy; and I also intended to include the body, and also a theoretical panorama—along with meditation and work on the affective domain. In this, I was expecting from the outset to follow the basic scheme of Gurdjieff's work, which claimed to engage the physical, emotional, and mental spheres in a balanced manner while emphasizing a "fourth factor": the mind in itself, beyond its cognitive, rational, and active aspects.

The implicit curriculum that would come to embody this integrative intent was to be different from the mosaic of practices that had comprised Ichazo's work in Arica. Broadly speaking, it integrated three streams of influence: Buddhist meditation, the rare composite of Christian esotericism that had reached me through Idries Shah and Ichazo, and psychotherapy.

I had always felt that psychotherapy had the potential to constitute a path with a dignity comparable to that of Oriental spirituality. And since I would in time understand that psychotherapy is not a single path but a joint cultivation of self-knowledge and spontaneity, related in the Greek mysteries to the figures of Apollo and Dionysus, in retrospect I could say that SAT involved an attempt to integrate four spiritual paths: the Esoteric Christian that I had imbibed from Gurdjieff, Shah, and Ichazo; the Buddhist; the Dionysian; and the Apollonian.^{3 *}

*The intuition of the name came to my mind already formed as a logotype with the three superimposed letters. In the emblem of the three letters, I was pleased from the start to understand that—according to the Hebrew and Cabbalistic alphabet—the A, or Aleph, is the first letter and that T is the last. A and T sound like the transition from the open to the closed, since phonetically the T is a phoneme in which the air finds an obstruction. A is yang, and T is yin. And what better symbol for the reconciliatory principle than the serpentine S winding between both, neither vowel nor completely consonant in its liquid continuity. Soon after, I was pleased to observe that the three letters also served well as an emblem of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis: the dialect that is in reality a *trialect*; the dialect of Hegel that Oscar Ichazo would later have to refine with his trialect. And I am also very pleased that the letters "TSA" are emblematic of the essential components of the universe: Time, Space, and Awareness, celebrated by Fritz Perls and incomparably explained by my later and actual master, Tarthang Tulku Rimpoche.

*Psychotherapy is Apollonian, in that it cultivates a purifying lucidity—a clarity that has a destructuring effect on our obsolete conditionings. On the other hand, therapy is Dionysian not only in that it is based on expression and communication, but in that it also entails an exploration of the depth of the mind through surrender. Psychotherapy, it seems to me, is an activity that encourages the facilitation of an organismic self-regulation and is a self-healing process based not only on gaining awareness, but also on daring to let go, surrendering and opening oneself up to the unknown. It is obvious, of course, that Dionysus is associated with pleasure; and from a certain point of view, we may say that psychotherapy has supported a restitution of pleasure to the life of a hyper-civilized world that (as I

Yet still later, when SAT became a formal program for the education of psychotherapists within a specific time frame, I implicitly chose to present it in professional and worldly terms, letting its esoteric origin be unspoken.

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Soon after SAT was born, events occurred just as in the fairy-tales, when the newborn child is visited by a host of fairy godmothers. A strong influence came from Tarthang Tulku Rimpoche, whose impact on my own life has been the most significant one since then. Also considerable was the impact of the visits of the renowned Rabbi Zalman Schachter, and the classes given by Ch'u Fang Chu (disciple of the last Taoist patriarch.), who taught us Tai Chi and the breathing practices of the circulation cycle of the “elixir”.

I also invited Dhiravamsa—who at the time lived in London, and as a result of this visit he later settled in California for some years before migrating to Spain. From the time of his first visit on we were also provided with a good diet of Vipassana. Sri Harish Johari, an expert in Ayurvedic medicine and Indian Tantrism, also became part of the teaching staff of SAT during his last three years of activity in California, and also the influence of Bob Hoffman, who was hardly known at that time, was to significantly enrich our work.

The method that Hoffman had until then applied individually with his patients— geared to help individuals restore their loving capacity by repairing their relationships with their parents—inspired me to design a group process following a similar pattern. This process, which continues to be an essential part of our program, later inspired Hoffman's own later work with groups* and has continued to evolve, like everything else in the integrative and ecumenical school that came to be known as “the SAT programs.”

My original group in Berkeley, created in 1971, was followed by a parallel group in 1972, formed by relatives and friends of my earlier students, whom I had been unable to accommodate earlier, or who had not yet been interested when the first group started. And then a

have been pointing out all along) has involved a turning against our instinctive nature. But I think the foremost greatness of the Dionysian archetype is that it represents not only the universal archetype of death and resurrection, but also the sacralization of madness. The most peculiar feature of Dionysus, in the history of religious thinking, is not death and resurrection (which are, after all, part of what Joseph Campbell has called the “monomyth of the Hero”), but the dissolution of ordinary consciousness through surrender to what may be described as a “healing madness” that involves the emergence of new order from chaos and openness to a learning process where wisdom is acquired through the living out of foolishness.

* Presently known as the Hoffman Quadrinity Process.

third group followed, and a fourth, and still others, in which I did not directly participate and in which my contributions were carried out by my students (in the context of a program enriched by the aforementioned visiting teachers). And since my work of those days was like a powerful influence that generated an intense enthusiasm, it touched many lives deeply and had a seminal, although deliberately invisible, influence in the Bay Area and even California.

However, I felt as if I were only the transmitter of an inspiration that was bound to last no longer than the charismatic phase of my life's journey; and when, after about three years, this inspiration weakened I anticipated that, after having undergone the well-known expansive or "illuminative" phase of the inner journey I would enter the desert of the "dark night of the soul". When I saw that it was actually beginning to happen, I decided to leave my groups to my students, so as to devote myself more to my own inner process and where life might take me.

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Some fifteen years later, however, the cycle of inner contraction again led to another of expansion, and my work was reborn in Spain. Since the stimulus now was the invitation by a group of colleagues to conduct a "training program for psychotherapists" in the form of a month-long summer course that would meet over three consecutive years, the outer form of what I did was to be very different from the Berkeley venture.

Just as my work in Berkeley (which had also lasted three years) had adopted the form of a series of weekly meetings punctuated by occasional weekends—a format compatible with the participants' ordinary lives—the new format was that of a highly concentrated month-long residential retreat in the desert of Almería. And while my activity in California had been an improvisation, this new SAT took the form of a program proper (in which I integrated some of the inspirations of the past with the work of collaborators, among whom were included some of the best European Gestalt therapists).

Part of the content of the early SAT had been what I came, in time, to call "the Psychology of the Enneatypes"², so correspondingly now, part of what I conducted in Spain was to be a laboratory of self-study in light of the applications of the Personality Enneagrams to the understanding of personality. Only that this time it would be done in a more elaborate way; in Berkeley, for instance, I had never included Ichazo's teaching on the instinct-related subtypes, nor the virtues that constitute the "antidotes" to the nine basic passions, nor had I included the exploration of irrational ideas and other important themes. Also, just as I had originally presented

the earliest group applications of Hoffman's "Psychic Therapy" in Berkeley, I now recruited the collaboration of Suzy Stroke, who had by now become the main trainer in Brazil's Hoffman school, and had already integrated my own contributions into that process. I also invited the collaboration of a distinguished Latin American bodyworker and dancer, Graciela Figueroa, and Cheriff Chalakani, the Egyptian-Mexican co-creator of an elaborate form of re-birthing/reparenting. Also included among my staff were the two charismatic therapists who had invited me—Guillermo Borja from Mexico, and Dr. Antonio Asín, from the Basque country, who had previously invited me to work with his therapeutic community on several occasions and now thought that this intensive program was precisely what his followers needed.

After several years of convening in a special retreat center built for us in the desert of Almería, the program migrated to Castilla, then to Barcelona, then to a monastery in a village that had been the birthplace of the Cid; then to a large house in the countryside to the north of Burgos; and from there to other countries, beginning with Italy and Brazil. Also, as time progressed, other ingredients were added to this curriculum. And while it might seem that the sum of them amounted to a whimsical potpourri, I can also say that I chose them in implicit reference to a "deep structure."⁴

I have been often asked about "the secret" of my work, since the results have been so remarkable; and I have sometimes said that this has been due, in part, to its powerful ingredients (the psychology of Enneatypes, the "work on the inner family," Gestalt therapy, etc.) and in part to the way in which these are combined into a whole. Yet in giving such an answer, I have taken only the curriculum into account, rather the living school, staffed by persons whose lives were deeply affected by my own influence, and who had been through the experiences that had allowed them to let go of childhood resentment, to integrate the instinctual world into their own lives, and to generate inner peace. Furthermore, just as in chemistry a mixture is one thing and a synthesis yet another, not even a group of competent therapists and teachers would have amounted to the living school that I had the privilege of conducting. For, thanks to a shared understanding of many things, there emerged from our joint work an ability to "dance together"

⁴ A variation of the "pyramidal model" which I have already referred in explaining both the psyche and holistic education, and which I might call a "pyramidal model of the Ways to Self-realization," in reference to the "three loves" balanced by wisdom. I have explained this at length in my book, *The Patriarchal Ego*, scheduled to appear in print through Feltrinelli in Italy this year, and hopefully in English in the not-distant future.

that allowed program participants to perceive the parts of the program that we presented as facets of a living whole.

As our programs migrated from Spain to Italy, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Germany and other countries (even Australia), these have continued to be perfected, so that the work has become ever more precise and efficient. This has made it possible for the process to be conducted in a shorter time, much as portable computers have grown ever more compact over time while simultaneously accomplishing more.

At times I have referred to the SAT school as “an ego-grinding device.” Some have called it “a school of love”; others, as a place where they became more themselves, more human, or more authentic; and for many, it has meant discovering the spiritual dimension of life. Most have left behind old ways of feeling and seeing things, and also have seen their lives take on a new direction. In sum, for the majority of the participants, this process has constituted a gateway to a process of transformation; and for those who are more committed and sincere, an important part of the Path.

At present, the “SAT program” consists of three modules of approximately ten days each, one every year. And as the years pass, I have had the satisfaction of hearing ever-more-substantial declarations regarding the results of the work, and ever-more-moving expressions of gratitude from the participants at the end of each of the courses.

Over and over again, the SAT program has attracted and served highly experienced therapists as well as teachers and beginners; and each of the courses has left us with the feeling that it was “almost like a miracle,” both because what transpired was so extraordinarily meaningful and because of the enormous learning experience that took place within its limited time span. It could be regarded as a true experience of “initiation,” in the sense that it brings people to an unknown dimension: it sets them forth on a path that—in spite of not being a predetermined one—is a process that becomes irresistible as the journeyers begin to comprehend its meaning.

Of course, I would say that the remarkable results reflect not only the merit of those who have worked seriously on themselves and the efforts of my collaborators, but also the intervention of other factors—from the providential and unrepeatably, to the “magic” created in each group by an authentic community and by the blessings of diverse spiritual lineages. I also consider this success to be an experimental confirmation of my guiding conviction that *in order*

to help others, we do not need extensive theoretical studies, but, rather, the experience of our own transformative journey, with its attendant progress in insight, benevolence, freedom, and well being, plus a relevant practical-experiential training and a clear vision of certain fundamental notions concerning the “inner journey.”

I believe it is not an exaggeration to say that the results have been unprecedented, and current evaluations, presently being conducted at the Universities of Oxford and Barcelona, support this impression.

An important aspect of the SAT program has been its psycho-social nature: the group of participants becomes a space of intimacy, in which all members may show themselves as they are, explore alternative forms of behavior, and discover that they are accepted and appreciated beyond their customary roles.

Yet in addition to being a place where people feel accepted and validated, the SAT process and the SAT culture contain a strong element of confrontation, so that I would say that it involves a good balance between support and a shared “holy war against the ego.”

Some time ago, I invited a group of colleagues to share their impressions of how the “SAT experience” had influenced them, and what struck me was their emphasis on how much the participants had appreciated the example of staff members—who, in spite of being respected professionals, continued to “work on themselves” rather than hiding behind a professional role.

Today, it is widely recognized that psychotherapy depends more on the patient-therapist relationship than on techniques or insight. Usually, what is stressed concerning the relationship between the patient and the therapist is the degree of mental health and benevolence of the therapist, which are regarded as the more relevant factors to the quality of such relation, for these permit the therapist to “contain” his or her patients in a way different from that in which their parents related to them in the past. In reflecting on the SAT experience, however, I would like to emphasize the therapeutic value of *authenticity*, that is a characteristic feature of the SAT community, and one through which participants are able to help one another grow.

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As I come to the end of this book, I want to reiterate my conviction that our diseased and crisis-ridden world *calls* for the help of individual transformation. A healthy society cannot be

conceived without healthy individuals; and yet the need for self-realization can be satisfied only to a very limited extent by traditional means. For decades, I have sought to stimulate something like *a democratization of psychotherapy*—or, on a broader scale, *an education that teaches people to work spiritually and psychologically on themselves*. The SAT school may be described as a place where people not only learn to work on themselves, but also to help each other reciprocally in this process.

Particularly in our age of business and propaganda, I cannot stop imagining that my belief to the effect that my own work may constitute a master key for the transformation of education (and thus a precious resource toward the way out of our critical collective predicament) may sound like a blatant sales pitch, if not the expression of a messianic delusion. However, those who know me well are aware that I have never sold anything in my life till now. And I hope that the wider public comes to know me enough, through this book, to sense that what motivates me—aside from an interest in the common good—is rather a sense of responsibility towards my work, comparable to that of a father who cares about his children. And since year after year, hundreds of people who participate in my programs assure me that I have created something with a great life-favoring potential, even something that could change society through the education of educators, I have felt justified in sharing the good news.

As I intend to step back from the activity that I have generated—“with a foot already in the stirrup,” as Cervantes wrote in the dedication of his *Persiles*—leaving the task of assisting the transformation of education to the efforts of others, I feel like the character of a fairytale who, in the back garden of his very own house, has discovered a magic plant whose nectar can be poison to the dragon that devastates the region.

While carrying out my usual work, I came to understand—after many years and in an apparently accidental way—that this activity, which initially seemed destined only for the benefit of my friends and then of my psychotherapy students (and, indirectly, their patients), could play a key part in the transformation of education. And since I was beginning to understand that it is on education that our collective destiny depends, I naturally felt like one who finds himself in possession of a precious public resource. Yet this has not been enough to cause me to feel that I have already accomplished my task. For what is a seed, unless it is planted in a receptive terrain?

Thus I have taken an interest in expressing my vision of the tragically wasted potential of education, and of my own contribution to the possible education of educators. And as a result of my participation in private conversations and public conferences, I have been able to attract the interest of some governments,³ institutions,⁴ and many teachers in Europe and Latin America. Some of the latter have joined together in different countries, creating organizations whose intention is to promote and finance programs for the teaching staff of primary and secondary schools, as a supplement to the curricula in schools of education or in the context of continuous education.⁵ More recently, a foundation bearing my name has arisen in Barcelona, thanks to the initiative of friends and believers in the idea so well expressed by H.G. Wells, that I have often paraphrased as, “Our future is a race between the transformation of education, and catastrophe.”⁶

Let us all hope—and take it upon ourselves to ensure—that the transformation of education wins the race.