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A Common Vision Realized Holistic Educators' and Utopian Visionaries' Ideas Brought to Life

Kristan A. Morrison
Radford University

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Abstract

This article will explore the themes of the common educational vision of two distinct groups — holistic educators and American utopian authors of late-19th to mid/late-20th century — and then propose that this joint vision, along with its actualization in a variety of forms of alternative education (e.g. unschooling, democratic free schooling, Montessori and Waldorf schools, etc.) is positive evidence of a “self-organizing revolution” (R. Miller, 2008). This revolution is working to challenge dominant educational paradigms, and should serve as a source of hope for many who despair that more idealistic visions of education will never come to be in our country.



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Judging by my brief visit, the fact that no formal curriculum prevails does not mean that Crick students miss the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, though they tend to learn them in concrete contexts. But they also learn a great deal of sideline information and skills. An Ecotopian ten year old, as I have observed, knows how to construct a shelter; how to grow, catch, and cook food; how to make simple clothes; how hundreds of species of plants and animals live, both around their schools and in the areas they explore on backpacking expeditions. . . . It might also be argued that Ecotopian children seem in better touch with each other than the children in our large, crowded, discipline-plagued schools; they evidently learn how to organize their lives in a reasonably orderly and self-propelled way. Chaotic and irregular though they appear at first . . . the Ecotopian schools seem to be doing a good job of preparing their children for Ecotopian life. (Callenbach 1975, p. 153-154)

No formal curriculum? No clear recognition that children are in school? An enormous amount of learning going on? Children in touch with one another? Many people who are intimately familiar with the conventional form of education (particularly in the U.S.) might view such a vision with skepticism and instant dismissal as some sort of “utopian dream” that is unattainable. But is it? Are utopias so incompatible with current cultural assumptions (R. Miller, 1997) that they are descriptive of “no real place” (Bevilacqua, 2017)? Are utopian visions speaking of an idealized, impossible future, or a possible, best future? In this article, I argue that visions of education in selected utopian works match those of holistic educators who have worked and succeeded in making education different. These educators have not only created an idealistic vision of education, they are also in the process of realizing a profound cultural revolution. Although dominant, conventional education in the United States has been largely subsumed by regimentation, technocracy, and meritocracy (Shapiro, 2006), there is evidence that a “self-organizing revolution” (R. Miller, 2008) is happening. This revolution is working to challenge dominant educational paradigms, and should serve as a source of hope for many who despair that “the age of dreams is over” (Davis & Kinna, 2010, p. xiii).

Selection of Groups

Holistic Educators

My primary research interest lies in the area of alternative forms of education, particularly those involving high degrees of student autonomy (R. Miller, 2004; Morrison, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2016; Neill, 1960). In my broad background reading about such education forms, I encountered a 1997 book entitled *What Are Schools For?* by Ron Miller which explored the cultural seeds of American education and then provided a history of various educators who critiqued the fruit of these seeds (the education system), educators whom he labeled “holistic.” Intrigued, I looked into other work by Ron Miller, and at John Miller’s (no relation to Ron Miller) books from 1988 (*The Holistic Curriculum*) and 2011 (*Transcendental Learning: The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Fuller, Peabody, and Thoreau*), Lucila Rudge’s 2010 book *Holistic Education: An Analysis of Its Pedagogical Application* and her 2016 article on holistic education in public schools, and Nathaniel Needle’s 1997 article about lifelong holistic learning.

“Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace” (R. Miller, 2000). Holistic education seeks radical changes in our society’s dominant cultural assumptions, changes that will bring wholeness, an inclusive spirituality, and interconnectedness to our society where these have heretofore been limited, suppressed, or denied (J. Miller, 1988, 2011; R. Miller, 1997, 2000; Needle, 1997; Rudge, 2010, 2016). According to Rudge (2016),

Holistic education incorporates ideas and principles from humanistic (Plato, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Tolstoy, Maslow, and Rogers) and progressive educators (Dewey and his followers), transpersonal thinkers (Channing, Emerson, Thoreau, Ripley, Alcott, Montessori, Steiner, and Krishnamurti), anarchists (Ferrer), social critics (Paul Goodman, Jules Henry, Edgar Friedengerb, Myles Horton), and radical critics (Holt, Kozol, Illich, and A.S. Neill). It also integrates Indigenous and ecological worldviews, perennial and life philosophy principles, system theory, and feminist thought. (p. 170)

While the above-listed individuals do not have identical agendas, they are people from different generations, different countries, with different specific foci, who all share their desire to make education, and thus culture, markedly different from the status quo.

Creators of Utopian Visions of Education

In reading more about holistic educators, I began to see themes emerging of counter-cultural assumptions of a new worldview. And those themes evoked memories of a utopian novel I had read while in graduate school, Ernest Callenbach’s 1975 work *Ecotopia* (excerpted above). It struck me that the future education system Callenbach envisioned had tremendous similarities to the ideas of the holistic educators described by R. Miller, J. Miller, Needle, and Rudge. I wondered if this was a “one-off,” or if there were other American utopian authors who articulated common visions of an ideal, future education system or approach. I hypothesized that mapping holistic ideas to utopian descriptions of an ideal education system would provide those skeptical to change with a clear vision of what is possible — for if it can be imagined, it can be created.

There is a wealth of utopian writing (along with its dystopian sibling) and so to narrow my search in answering my question, I turned to L.T. Sargent’s 1979 annotated bibliography, *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975*. From this source, I chose to focus on American utopian authors primarily because I am located in the United States and R. Miller’s (1997) work, which was the initiating frame for my research, articulated the cultural assumptions unique to the United States and its history. As for selection of specific works, I did a convenience sampling because many listed in Sargent’s bibliography were obscure and thus unavailable or out of print. I was able to locate seven works (whole books and articles) that were readily available, by American authors, and included a detailed description of an idealized education system. These included the following:

- Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1887)
- Addison Hibbard’s “Utopia College: A Prospectus”(1929)

- John Dewey's "Dewey Outlines Utopian Schools" (1933)
- Emanuel Posnack's *The 21st Century Looks Back* (1946)
- R.A.Lafferty's "The Primary Education of the Cameroi"(1968)
- Theodore Brameld's *The Teacher as World Citizen* (1974)
- Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975)

The utopian visions of education offered by these authors were intended, I believe, to "incite us to action" and envision change for our societies along particular directions (Partyka, 2016).

Cultural Assumptions and Counter-Assumptions in Holistic and Utopian Thinking

The envisioned directions that the utopian authors propose parallel those outlined in R. Miller's 1997 study of holistic education, *What Are Schools For? Holistic Education in American Culture*. In this work, the author outlines five cultural assumptions that undergird the current institution of education in the United States. These five assumptions include Puritan theology, scientific reductionism, capitalism, restrained democratic ideology, and nationalism. R. Miller argues that holistic educators have been troubled by the impacts of these assumptions on our institution of education and "have articulated a postmodern vision of culture grounded in spiritual and ecological wisdom, democratic community, and a deep appreciation for the organic and developmental aspects of human existence" (R. Miller, 1997, p.73). Using R. Miller's (1997) five cultural assumptions as a baseline framework for comparison, I outline below five counter-assumptions set forth both by holistic educators and utopian authors.

Puritan Theology Countered by a Transcendent Theology

The first of the cultural assumptions that R. Miller outlines is that of a Puritan theology. American culture draws from this theology that humans have innate evil impulses, and that at birth we were each tainted by original sin. Thus, hard work, stern discipline (rooted in the authoritative text of the Bible), and extrinsic motivators must serve to control humans. In this theology exists the belief that if there were no external control of people's evil impulses, society would crumble into chaos, social upheaval and anarchy. Puritan theology draws a parallel between an undisciplined society and nature, viewing them both as chaotic, spontaneous, and dangerous.

I term the holistic counter-assumption to Puritan theology a "transcendent theology." Within this theology are a series of beliefs which include the following:

- People are innately good, not evil.
- The goodness in people is the spark of soul or the Divine.
- The soul or Divine spark must unfold naturally.

- Extrinsic motivators hinder discovery of the soul or Divine Spark.

People are innately good, not evil. The first belief in the transcendent theology is in the innate *goodness* of people. In *What Are Schools For?* (1997) Ron Miller showed that many, if not all, holistic educators, including Francisco Ferrer, William Ellery Channing, Friedrich Froebel, Johann Pestalozzi, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Francis Parker, and the child-centered educators all believed in the “latent integrity of human nature” (p. 157) which can emerge once societal restrictions (based on cultural assumptions) are removed.

The utopian authors read echoed this belief in their writings, arguing that once people are freed of repression and deprivation, their basic goodness becomes clear. For example, John Dewey (1933) wrote that in his utopia, there was an attitude that “included a rather ardent faith in human capacity” (p. 7). And Edward Bellamy, in *Looking Backward* (1887),

put the whole matter in the nutshell of a parable. . . . Let me compare humanity in the olden time [1880s] to a rosebush planted in a swamp, watered with black bog water, breathing miasmatic fogs by day, and chilled by poison dews at night. Innumerable generations of gardeners had done their best to make it bloom, but beyond an occasional half opened bud with a worm at the heart, their efforts had been unsuccessful. Many, indeed, claimed that the bush was no rosebush at all, but a noxious shrub, fit only to be uprooted and burned. . . . It [later] came about that the rosebush of humanity was transplanted and set in sweet, warm, dry earth, where the sun bathed it, the stars wooed it and the south wind caressed it. Then it appeared that it was indeed a rosebush. The vermin and mildew disappeared and the bush was covered with most beautiful red roses, whose fragrance filled the world. (p. 235-236)

The goodness in people is the spark of soul or the Divine. Holistic educators, in their “transcendent theology,” not only believe that there is a basic goodness to mankind, but that this goodness is the spark of something unknowable within each person. J. Miller (2011) calls this spark the soul or the “light within each individual” (p. 5), while others might view it as a connection to God/the Divine/ Tao/the Supernatural. Under a transcendent theology, the purpose of culture, and thus of education, is to provide an environment in which that soul element can show itself. Institutions and practices must not, as argued by a Puritan theology, be arranged to restrict human nature; rather, they must be arranged to free human nature to reveal its soul connection (J. Miller, 1988, 2011; R. Miller, 1997). The revelation of the soul connection is the purpose of life — that we are all meant to realize that we are more than ourselves (transcendent) and that we are put on this earth to fulfill an evolutionary purpose, to take us beyond where we are now in attitude, relation to one another, awareness, and so on (J. Miller, 1988).

The utopian authors mirrored both the belief in the connection to a soul and the belief in an evolutionary purpose to existence. Emanuel Posnack (1946) wrote that “the primary objective of education today [in Posnack’s conception of the future] is human enlightenment in its broadest aspect. . . . Education is for promoting peace, freeing one from political and economic bonds, improving health, and enhancing man’s sense of values” (p. 210). And Edward Bellamy (1887) wrote that after people retire from the industrial army (mandatory community service done between ages 21 and 45), they devote themselves “to the higher exercise of [their] faculties, the

intellectual and spiritual enjoyments and pursuits which alone mean life. . . . [They] are considered the main business of existence” (p. 158). Bellamy also wrote that “the betterment of mankind from generation to generation [is] the fulfillment of the evolution, when the divine secret hidden in the germ shall be perfectly unfolded” (p. 238-239).

The soul or Divine spark must unfold naturally. Holistic educators believe that the soul connection within each individual must be allowed to “unfold” naturally. This means that each person, from birth, must have an environment in which he can, on his own initiative, explore and discover his potentials, talents, passions, and interests (J. Miller, 1988, R. Miller, 1997; Needle, 1997; Rudge, 2010). And they further argue that an outside entity (teacher, society, parents) should not dictate which gifts (or subjects or skills) are more valuable than others, or try to push people along paths they are not meant to take (R. Miller, 1997; Needle, 1997). In essence, then, these educators are urging that we do away, to a large degree, with a standardized curriculum where each child learns the same set body of things at the same age.

Once again, the utopian authors presented worldviews that ran along this same line of letting the individual find himself, and thus his transcendence, through having the freedom to explore his interests and gifts. In Theodore Brameld’s 1974 work, *The Teacher as World Citizen*, he wrote that in his future world “the society [will be] about succeeding in the flowering of our own potentialities” (p. 40) and that teachers will provide an environment for that flowering of each human being. In Ecotopian schools, author Ernest Callenbach (1975) detailed how children spend most of their day “attending to their projects” (p. 148). Addison Hibbard (1929) envisioned, in his article “Utopia College: A Prospectus,” a future in which students will be given the “opportunity to develop themselves. . . . to grow from within” by undertaking a variety of independent studies (p. 323). John Dewey (1933) wrote that in his utopia, the people work to discover

the aptitudes, the tastes, the abilities and weaknesses of each boy and girl. . . . They. . . . find out what each individual person had in him from the very beginning and then devote themselves to [helping all] develop their positive capacities. (p. 7)

And, last, Bellamy (1887) showed support for this holistic view when the character of Dr. Leete stated that in their world of the year 2000, “the utmost pains are taken to enable [every man to find for himself] what his natural aptitudes really are” (p. 49). Dr. Leete went on to state that “the public policy is to encourage all to develop [even] suspected talents” (p. 55).

The utopian authors also argued in favor of allowing individuals’ gifts to unfold at their own pace, unrushed. Brameld (1974) stated that “the educative process begins with birth and continues virtually to the end of human life” (p. 66). In *Ecotopia*, Callenbach (1975) illustrated that Ecotopian schools don’t age grade; instead teachers work with groups of children at varying ages, but who are at one general level of development. And in *Looking Backward*, Bellamy (1887) wrote that “it is recognized nowadays that the natural aptitudes of some are later than those of others in developing” (p. 55-56).

The utopian authors further argued that outside entities should not dictate which manifestations of the soul or individual gifts had more value than others. For example Brameld (1974) wrote that “needs and talents vary [and so we ask only] from each according to his abilities” (p. 38) because in his view of the future, the new world order will affirm “human life in all its infinite range of capacities” (p. 45). And Callenbach (1975) wrote about how the Ecotopians stopped trying to make the “children adapt to the schools” by making them follow a

formal curriculum and began “to adapt the schools to the children” (p.123). As for the utopian people in Dewey’s 1933 article, they were puzzled by a visitor’s question about specific end goals/objectives of education. They replied that “the notion that there was some special end [and thus a need for special subjects or skills to meet that end] which the young should try to attain was completely foreign to their thought” (p. 7).

Extrinsic motivators hinder discovery of the soul or Divine Spark. The last element of the holistic educators’ “transcendent theology” is that, in the making of soul connections, there is no place for extrinsic motivators like those used in the Puritan theology. Fear of punishment, desire for rewards, grades, etc. all just hinder and thwart one’s journey to finding oneself (R. Miller, 1997). Utopian authors, once again, supported this assertion in their writings. In fact, they created worlds wherein such extrinsic rewards were irrelevant — for, in most of them, the society itself, through how it was designed, met all basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, love, etc.). In turn, there was little need for motivators to convince people to find themselves, for the desire to do so came out naturally and was unhindered by a competitive quest to survive (specifics about these utopian societal structures will be detailed in the third counter-assumption below).

Scientific Reductionism Countered by Wholeness

The second cultural assumption outlined by R. Miller (1997) is scientific reductionism. In this assumption, everything can be broken down or fragmented into isolated building blocks. For example, a field of study can be broken down into isolated units and objectives. Under scientific reductionism, each part of everything is measurable, manipulable, and mechanistic. Each part thus can be examined rationally and empirically; presumably, there are no unknown, spiritual, or supernatural aspects that can interfere with this way of knowing.

Wholeness is the antithesis to scientific reductionism. The connection between the individual and the soul, as outlined in the transcendent theology counter-assumption above, was for the purpose of bringing together parts of a whole and making them more than just a sum of their parts. We are more and better when we connect to our soul and the world is more and better when it allows people to find that soul. Instead of viewing everything as made up of discrete, mechanistic, fragmented parts, holistic educators assert that everything is connected and thus everything is important — not just those things with an economic utility. Holistic educators urge our culture to recognize that all parts of the world — all peoples, all natural places and things — are vital parts of interconnected and contextual systems (Briggs & Peat, 1999; J. Miller, 1988; R. Miller, 1997; Needle, 1997; Rudge, 2010, 2016).

In the wholeness counter-assumption, holistic educators argue for the equitable value of

- all subjects of study — physical movement, science, math, music, etc.;
- all ways of knowing — rationally, logically, emotionally, intuitively, physically, aesthetically, spiritually, experientially;
- all people — all ethnicities, all ages, all genders, all abilities; and
- all creation (animals, nature, etc.).

Valuing all subject areas/disciplines. The utopian authors supported the above conceptions of wholeness. Regarding the valuing of all subject areas/disciplines, Brameld (1974) wrote that students are “not confined to academic studies . . . [they] reach far beyond classroom strictures” (p. 59) and focus much attention on the value of art. Posnack (1946) detailed the curriculum of the future, which included an emphasis on the traditional subjects (writing, history, math, etc.), but also placed an equal emphasis on health education and music. Callenbach (1975) also gave equal footing to some currently lesser-valued subjects, such as carpentry and tool work and also emphasized creative subjects like music, dance, art, etc. In *Looking Backward* (1887), Julian West (the man from the past) found that schools put a lot more focus on “physical culture” (p. 181) and on mechanical and agricultural knowledge than the schools he remembered.

Valuing all ways of knowing. Utopian authors also argued for the value of knowing things spiritually, rationally, emotionally, and physically. In “The Primary Education of the Cameroi,” author R.A. Lafferty (1968) stated that children learn through direct experience, not through curriculum pre-digested for them. Posnack (1946) wrote that in his future, early education is not designed to teach packaged theories and principles. Rather, there is a focus on “watching, fumbling, doing” (p. 211). Callenbach (1975) also emphasized experiential learning when discussing the schools in Ecotopia. He stated that much of what students learn came from “concrete contexts” as opposed to lectures and books (p. 153). And in Ecotopia, college students must alternate one year of work with every year of study, giving credence to the idea that there’s more than one valuable way of knowing and learning. And finally, Dewey (1933), in his utopian schools, envisioned the use of apprenticeships in order to help students learn by actions/experiences.

Valuing all people. Utopian authors also agree with the holistic idea that all people — all ethnicities, ages, abilities, genders, etc. — are of equal importance. Brameld (1974) wrote of equality between sexes and races as being considered a “majestic” value (p. 43). And equality between ages was highly valued as well in their society where “old people are not mistreated or shunted off to the side or discriminated against” (p. 49). In *Ecotopia* (1975), “women are truly equal” (p. 42), all different types of families are valued, and there

seems to be an easy. . . recognition that some people know more than others [but are not valued more than others]. . . . Greater ability doesn’t seem so invidious as with us, where it is really valued because it brings rewards of money and power. . . . Ecotopians seem to have an intuitive feeling for the fact that people excel in different things, and that [all people] can give to each other on many different levels. (p. 152-153)

And Dr. Leete, in Bellamy’s (1887) *Looking Backward*, spoke of how “the solidarity of the race and the brotherhood of man, which to you [in the 1880s, Mr. West] were but fine phrases, are, to our thinking and feeling, ties as real and as vital as physical fraternity” (p. 106).

All creation is equally valuable. Finally, on the point that all creation — human and nature — should be considered of equal importance, the utopian authors also concur. *Ecotopia* (1975) strongly communicated the idea that nature is of equal importance to human life. The Ecotopian society was utterly grounded in an ecological worldview. They aspired to be in balance with nature. Their laws made cars, noise, and air pollution illegal; they consolidated/compacted much of their living patterns, creating higher density areas rather than

sprawling suburbs thus allowing land to return to grassland, forest, orchards, and gardens; the government nationalized all waterfront properties and made them into parks; they did no clear cutting in their forests and even used large electric tractors with huge rubber tires that tore up the forest floor even less than oxen; they encouraged a population decline in order to put less pressure on their natural resources; they created plastics out of plants, rather than fossil fuels, and those plastics were biodegradable and produced without pollutants; they used geothermal, solar, and wind power as opposed to more environmentally-hostile energy sources; and Ecotopian schools gave their students a great deal of outdoor time in which to enjoy and interact with nature.

Capitalism Countered by a Loving, Rich World

Capitalism is the third cultural assumption that R. Miller (1997) identified in *What Are Schools For?* Under the capitalist assumption, individualism reigns supreme. The individual is totally in control of whether he survives and every person is seen as separate from every other person. People are locked into a competition — one against all others — to gain what they need to live and those individuals who work the hardest will acquire the most possession, services, and prestige (meritocracy). Under capitalism, there is little value placed on connections — internal or external — e.g. emotional, spiritual, or ecological concerns.

The capitalist assumption rests on the scientific reductionism assumption, that all people, as with all things, are separate entities locked in combat with one another over the seemingly scarce resources in the world. The holistic thinkers have a radically different view. They believe that if we act on the new assumptions of wholeness and a transcendent theology, then we will not continue to treat individuals as competitors in a national and world economy, and that capitalism will be replaced by an economic system which guarantees each person love, respect, food, clothing, and shelter. The idea is that if everyone is valued, then greed and hoarding becomes anathema, and if everyone believes in the soul or Divine connection in each person, then people will transcend any fighting instincts toward one another and be more loving and caring (J. Miller, 1988; R. Miller, 1997; Rudge, 2010, 2016).

Once again, the utopian authors expressed visions which mirror that of the holistic educators, for they too see a world lacking deprivation and filled with love and care for all people and things. In Bellamy's (1887) vision of a future economy, the government owns everything and people are guaranteed food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare for life simply in exchange for working for the community from ages 21 to 45. All jobs are equally valued and people have no need of money, as the government provides them with a credit corresponding to their share of the annual product of the nation. Thus, this new world has done away with the competitiveness of capitalism, the man vs. man attitude. As Bellamy stated, "buying and selling is considered absolutely inconsistent with the mutual . . . benevolence which should prevail between citizens. . . . Buying and selling. . . is an education in self-seeking at the expense of others." (p. 69). And the idea of meritocracy is done away with in *Looking Backward*, for

the fundamental idea of the social system . . . [is] that all who do their best are equally deserving whether that best be great or small. . . . [and] the right of a man to maintenance at the nation's table depends on the fact that he is a man and not on the amount of health or strength he may have. (p. 103-105)

Dewey (1933) also envisioned a world in which there would be an “abolition of an acquisitive economic society” (p. 7). Callenbach (1975) described an economy in which all people are guaranteed a minimum subsistence, including health care, and in which no Ecotopian can inherit any property at all (thus, no great accumulations of wealth and/or hoarding of resources). And Brameld (1974) also described an economy in which everyone is entitled to medical care and in which money has become obsolete.

Restrained Democratic Ideology Countered by Liberal Democracy

R. Miller (1997) outlined a fourth cultural assumption as that of restrained democratic ideology. Democracy can be defined in multiple ways. While the liberal definition posits that each individual has an equal voice and value and thus should be an active participant in public life, under the conservative definition, there are some people (e.g. those who have risen to social and economic prominence) who are capable of weighing in more effectively on affairs of state and society. Thus other groups (typically those in the lower classes, or lower status gender and race/ethnic groups) are incapable and should step back.

Excessive liberty granted to [the incapable] individuals is seen as a dangerous threat to the social order. Therefore, freedom must go hand-in-hand with discipline. The welfare of the community — the common good — supersedes the personal freedom of the individual.
(R. Miller, 1997, p. 14)

Thus, the supposedly more-capable group uses its power to convince those who are not in the elite class to believe that they should limit, or restrain, their personal freedoms by following the advice of others, conforming themselves, surrendering their skepticism, not thinking too deeply about issues that affect them, etc., all in order to serve the public good.

Just as the capitalism cultural assumption is inextricably tied to the scientific reductionism assumption, so too is the restrained democratic ideology assumption tied to capitalism. Thus, if a society alters its economy as the holistic thinkers desire, then, concomitantly, will come a change in the restrained democratic ideology assumption. In other words, if a world were created in which every person is valued equally and all basic needs met equally, then the accumulation of power by elites over the masses would not come to be and a more liberal definition of democracy would emerge (J. Miller, 1988; R. Miller, 1997; Rudge, 2010, 2016).

The utopian authors agree that with improvements in how people value one another and nature will come an increase in the level of true democracy enjoyed by all citizens. Brameld (1974) spoke of the inextricability of human renewal as a whole (valuing all equally, believing in transcendent connection) from political and economic renewal. He stated that none “can function without the support of the others” (p. 41). And in *Ecotopia* (1975), valuing everyone equally in the community and the alterations in the economy led to a vast decentralization of the media and political bodies. This allowed people to participate a great deal more in the public life of the country, and participate on equal footing.

Nationalism Countered by Balancing Individual and Community Needs

As discussed above, within the Puritan theological assumption is the belief that society would crumble without stern discipline (work, laws, mores). Under scientific reductionism and capitalism, people are viewed as mechanistic and separate parts that make up a society. The parts are often in conflict/competition with one another, but this benefits society in that it pushes us all forward. And under the restrained democratic ideology assumption, the differential power between classes is seen as necessary for a smooth running of the status quo system. Nationalism, the fifth and final cultural assumption R. Miller (1997) detailed, is the thread that ties the previous four assumptions together. The author argued that adherence to the four cultural assumptions leads to the belief that society will be strong, stable, effective, safe, and invulnerable to outside nations. Similar to the restrained democratic ideology cultural assumption, nationalism convinces the masses (quite often through the medium of education) that their willing subjugation to the “nation” is the best thing for everyone in the society. But this submerging, or giving up of one’s individualism, is not equal across all groups in society. Oppressed groups (lower SES, minority ethnic/race groups, females, and anyone on the LGBTQ+ spectrum) are denied democratic freedoms and opportunities at the hands of an oligarchy. The holistic thinkers counter this assumption of nationalism (putting the good of the community over the good of the individual) with the idea that the public good and the private good should be balanced (R. Miller, 1997; Rudge, 2010, 2016). This balance is tantamount to the dynamic balance that exists in ecological systems (Briggs & Peat, 1999).

Holistic thinkers, as described earlier, believe that a greater, unknowable power has given each individual certain distinct, unique faculties. They further argue that this power has given individuals these gifts in order that, all together, individuals would make up a system in which all gifts are represented. In a sense, each individual is a separate piece of a puzzle who, when all put together, create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Such human communities thus mirror the equilibrium found in bioregional systems. Holistic educators argue that the current dominant worldview, based as it is in the cultural assumptions outlined above, interferes with the natural equilibrium of human community systems by trying to make nearly all the puzzle pieces the same. The nationalistic assumption has convinced us that social discipline and uniformity is necessary for the health of our nation. The systems in society (particularly education) discourage individuals from connecting with non-economically utilitarian aspects of their existence (aesthetics, emotions, intuition, etc.), and force them to compete in an economic system (capitalism) that oftentimes makes them into false beings in order to earn a living (R. Miller, 1997). Holistic educators argue that if people were trusted to become the unique puzzle pieces they were meant to be, then the good of the nation of mankind would be served. In this sense, if the individual needs are met, then the community’s/nation’s needs will be met too.

The utopian authors also echo this balance between the public and private good. In Posnack’s (1946) future “there is no regimentation [social uniformity] of human beings. . . . There is instead a prevailing faith in the whole of mankind” (p. 241). Callenbach (1975) expressed the naturalist belief that “there is no such thing as a thing, there are only systems” (p. 104), thus supporting the idea that even individuals make up a system called a community. And Bellamy (1887) argued that each person’s gifts should be given the opportunity to emerge so that each individual can contribute his

quota of industrial or intellectual services to the maintenance of the nation. . . . The principle on which [the] industrial army is organized is that a man's natural endowments, mental and physical, determine what he can work at most profitably to the nation and most satisfactorily to himself. (p. 46-49)

Bellamy also argued that “there is no such thing in a civilized society as self-support, [instead] complex mutual dependence becomes the universal rule” (p. 105) and everyone depends on everyone else to use their gifts. And finally, Bellamy stated that the nation must be conceived “as a mighty heaven-touching tree whose leaves are its people, [who are] fed from its veins and [are] feeding it in turn” (1887, p. 207).

The Counter-Assumptions Operationalized in Education

The holistic/utopian counter-assumptions detailed above do not simply exist on a theoretical plane; they have been operationalized in many forms of education that exist today. The application of the utopian and holistic counter-assumptions in “real life” is evidence that challenges to dominant educational paradigms can happen and should serve as a source of hope that idealized visions for the future can more fully come to be.

Detailed accounts of how these alternative (non-mainstream) forms of education enact each of the counter-assumptions can be found in the work of those who have studied individual cases. This work includes a plethora of books on different types of schools, entire journals and magazines that have emerged over the years, including *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning*, *Paths of Learning*, *Other Education*, and *Growing Without Schooling*, and individual articles/studies found in a wide array of educational publications. What follows below is an extremely brief review, provided simply to confirm that these visions are in existence today.

Enactment of the Transcendent Theology and Wholeness Counter-Assumptions

Some schools and educational approaches in the United States have attempted to actualize a transcendent theology, which implicitly embraces wholeness. R. Miller (2004) has provided the term “spiritual developmentalist” to some educational models which believe in the unfolding of the human soul along distinct developmental paths, or speak of the Divine Inner Teacher, or have intense faith in the innate goodness of each human. Such schools or approaches include those of the Friends (Quakers) (R. Miller, 2002), Waldorf/Steiner (Hale & MacLean, 2004; Marshak, 1997; Rudge, 2016), and Montessori (Haskins, 2010; Rudge, 2016; Seldin, 2000), as well as those who ascribe to unique mixtures of multiple spiritual practices/beliefs (Blue Mountain School, “Contemplative, Progressive Model,” n.d.; Marshak, 1997; Rudge, 2016). Freedom-based or student-directed approaches to learning (such as democratic free schooling or unschooling), while not necessarily invoking the language of a Divine, do evidence a strong faith in the innate goodness of each person and thus allow a high degree of autonomy for children in their settings (Greenberg, 1991; Mercogliano, 1998; Morrison, 2007; Neill, 1960; Posner, 2009 to name just a few).

In many of these schools, they enact practices which counter the Puritan theology and scientific reductionism of conventional schools. For example, children are not strictly age-graded as they are in conventional schools; rather, there exists multi-age grading, or the teachers loop with the children for 8 years (Waldorf) allowing more patience for the natural unfolding of the

soul/Divine spark within each child. Additionally, while some of these schools are more open to a broader variety of activities, pedagogical practices, and curricular outcomes than others, they all share a recognition that everybody, everything, every way of knowing, and all subjects have inherent value. They encourage close relationships between teachers and students (de-emphasizing the hierarchy that exists between adults and children in conventional schools). They integrate multiple subjects in various projects/activities rather than strictly separating them as discrete units. They encourage much hands-on “learning by doing” (especially out in the “real world” of nature), thereby incorporating the physical body and love of creation into children’s learning. They recognize that there are a variety of talents and interests that children may have, all of which are valuable, and they assert that the school must build off of those talents and interests to some degree. In most of these schools, extrinsic motivators, such as grades, or seeking the scarce approval of an authority figure, or competing openly with others are either non-existent or de-emphasized. The schools act to create an uninhibited, less manipulated environment in which the individual can unfold in all his/her wholeness.

Enactment of the World Filled with Love and Care Counter-Assumption

A number of schools and educational approaches in the United States have attempted to work toward a world which lacks deprivation and is filled with love and care for “the other.” While these schools cannot change society writ large as the utopian authors are able to do in their fiction, they do have an impact on society writ small, their local community. For example, a number of the schools mentioned in the section above are situated within ecovillages, cohousing, land trusts, income-sharing communes, co-ops, or spiritual communities in which resources for basic survival needs are pooled (to varying degrees) (see the Alternative Education Resource Organization’s list of member schools, found at <http://www.educationrevolution.org/store/findaschool/memberschools/> for more specifics). And such schools and educational approaches are generally advocates for social-emotional learning, building trusting relationships, and treating others with love and care (e.g. Blue Mountain School, “Mission, Vision, and Values,” n.d.; Posner, 2009; Rudge, 2016).

Enactment of Liberal Democracy and Balance between Individual and Community Needs Counter-Assumptions

There are a number of schools and educational approaches in the United States which have also attempted to enact a vision of liberal democracy in which community members all have a voice in the operation and decision-making for the school. This lateral sharing of power requires that there be a balance between individual and community needs, which often necessitates the existence of particular structures. For example, at Summerhill School, the Albany Free School, Brooklyn Free School, and many Sudbury Valley Schools, there exist “All-School,” “Governance,” or “Council” meetings with certain set procedures in place for any community member (student, teacher, parent, etc.) to raise concerns, introduce programs or proposals, suggest rule changes, or work through problems (Greenberg, 1991; Gunther, 2011; Mercogliano, 1998; Morrison, 2007; Neill, 1960; Posner, 2009).

The balance between individual and community needs within such a shared governance structure is a delicate one, and schools attempting to enact this holistic counter-assumption

sometimes encounter an imbalance within this dialectic. For example, what happens when one child, who might be struggling with interpersonal relationships, consistently breaks the community's agreed-upon rules, to the detriment of others within the community? Do the needs of the individual child trump those of the entire community? While many of the holistic-oriented schools in the literature have structures in place to work through such issues (e.g. there are few to no zero-tolerance policies in such schools; rather, much is settled through a variety of conflict resolution/restorative justice strategies), it is not unheard of to encounter times when the community's needs outweighed the individual's and the individual was asked to leave the community (Afzali, Suchak, & Suchak, 2017; Mercogliano, 1998; Neill, 1960). This scenario begs the question: is this school truly enacting a holistic vision? And more broadly speaking, when alternative schools break off from the mainstream and become private schools, as many do, have they abandoned the greater community's good of public education for all in order to go off into an enclave that better serves themselves as individuals? This might be where the real-life, incremental, holistic changes detailed above produce inferior results to those of the utopian visionaries, who are able to envision whole-society change in their works of fiction.

Conclusion

Our society today is plagued by innumerable problems, problems which we try to address by applying the same old assumptions and worldview. Under the Puritan theology, we tend to blame problems on individuals. Following scientific reductionism, we try to pluck out "defective parts" in society and try to fix these parts in a decontextualized setting. We feel that the best way to solve our economic issues is by becoming more and more competitive and focusing on endless growth. Under a restrained democratic ideology, most people feel frustrated in their efforts to effect change. And we are constantly told, by the guardians of culture, to keep trying to solve our problems in these old, status quo ways, because that is what is best for the nation. It is time, though, that we learn that our taught worldviews are always a part of the problem and that particular tensions and dislocations always unfold from the entire system rather than from some defective "part." Envisioning an issue as purely a mechanical problem to be solved may bring temporary relief of symptoms but, in the long run, it could be more effective to look at the overall context in which a particular problem manifests itself (Briggs & Peat, 1999).

What this means is that our worldview and our cultural assumptions, i.e. our context, could be a large part of our problems and that these must change. Perhaps it is time that we follow the lead of holistic thinkers and utopian authors who have mapped out new cultural beliefs. Through their example, we see that "the value of the utopian impulse lies. . . in its power to set men free from their apathetic or suffering acceptance of the world as it is, and to give them self-transcending purposes" (Brameld, 1974, p. ix).

What is the role of educators in this age of problems, social stress, conflict, and change? How should teachers, most of whom work in a field that serves the status quo, deal with their desires to really attack cultural problems, not just their symptoms? How do we get modern society to "free our children's spirits from the mechanical, calculating grip of social efficiency and economic reductionism, so that our highest human aims— wisdom, compassion, democratic community, and peace— can possibly be realized"(R. Miller, 1997, p. 211)? Perhaps it is simply time we recognize that "we can no longer afford not to be utopian" (Brameld, 1974, p. x) and join with those already living the common, holistic educational vision.

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Author

Kristan Morrison is a professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Radford University. She teaches foundations of education courses and her research interests lie in the area of alternative, democratic, student-directed forms of education (e.g free schools, unschooling).

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