

Giving Hope back to our Young People: Creating a New Spiritual Mythology for Western Culture

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Introduction

There is extensive psychological literature which has linked hopelessness with depression and suicide risk for decades. Although there is a strong research and clinical base for targeting depression, there is a gap in the psychological literature when it comes to targeting hopelessness, specifically. In the absence of such a body of psychological literature, this paper draws on the research from the Futures Studies field which also records a rise in hopelessness, negativity and fear of the future among young people in the West.

These phenomena (hopelessness, depression and suicide) will be analysed using Causal Layered Analysis, a methodology from the Futures Studies field, pointing to the long-term psycho-social impact on youth of the materialistic worldview that underpins Western culture. The paper will also explore the question: 'how can hope for the future be promoted?' by looking beyond the dominance of materialism to spiritually inspired worldviews and the new metaphors and stories that arise from them.

Almost a century ago, in 1911, Rudolf Steiner warned of the withering of our world and the loss of hope and confidence that would occur unless Western culture became again imbued with spiritual wisdom. He claimed that 'the forces we need emphatically as life-giving forces are those of hope, of confidence in the future'. (Steiner 1964) He further pointed out that only by science and spirit becoming reunited again in 'spiritual science', a fully conscious synthesis of rational and trans-rational (spiritually inspired) thinking, would the life-giving forces of hope begin to re-vitalise Western culture. He claimed that 'spiritual science fills men with the strongest forces of hope'. (Steiner 1964)

These thoughts were echoed earlier this year in David Tacey's new book where he states that:

'Spirituality is not only about the deep, the meaningful and serious, but it also connects to the very well-springs of human vitality, and when it is omitted or repressed we unwittingly repress a great deal of human energy'. (Tacey 2003)

Youth Suicide as a Symptom of Deep Cultural Malaise

'Young people who become depressed, suicidal or fatigued in response to the hopelessness that confronts the world are living symbolic lives. Their struggles with meaning are not just personal struggles. They are trying to sort out the problems of society, and their sufferings, deaths and ruptures are not just personal tragedies but contributions to the spiritual dilemmas of the world.' P. 176 (Tacey 2003)

Over the past two decades a body of literature has emerged from the futures studies field which suggests that many young people in the Western world have lost their ability to imagine the future, particularly a positive future (Eckersley 1995; Eckersley 1996; Gidley 1998a; Hicks 1995; Hutchinson 1996; Rubin 1996; Slaughter 1989; Wilson 1989). By contrast, students educated in the Steiner education system were found to be more able to envision positive preferred futures and also felt empowered to work towards creating them. (Gidley 1998b; Gidley 2002b) This is believed to be related to the integrated, artistic and spiritually based nature of this approach. (Steiner 1965; Steiner 1967a; Steiner 1967b; Steiner 1972; Steiner 1976; Steiner 1981; Steiner 1982) The futures studies literature takes the increases in youth suicide and their correlates beyond the psychology field into a broader socio/cultural territory. It raises the spectre that our society may be creating a culture of hopelessness by feeding negative future images to our children and young people through the media, thereby fostering a climate whereby youth suicide increases. It is certainly the case that youth suicide has been increasing in Australia, with the suicide prevention literature demonstrating that the suicide rate among young males aged 15 to 24 years, has doubled in the past twenty years (and is four times the rate for young females) (Mitchell 2000). Youth suicide rates in Australia are among the highest in the industrialised world and suicide is now identified as one of the leading causes of death in young people (Bashir and Bennett 2000). The prospect that young people's negative views of the future may increasingly lead to clinical levels of hopelessness among adolescents underpins the need for interventions, to promote more positive future images. However, I believe that short targeted interventions on positive futures visioning in schools will do little more than provide band-aid solutions. What is needed is the promotion of positive futures images in a multi-layered fashion throughout society, including at the deepest layers where our tacit values are all but invisible.

Analysis of Youth Suicidality Based on a 'Futures' Perspective

Although thinking about the future has always been a part of human culture (e.g., soothsayers, prophets, and later 'utopians') it has only been in the past three or four decades that it has produced the academic research field known as Future Studies (Masini 1993). Researchers in the field have used the term 'futures studies'

rather than 'future studies' because of a belief that to think of the 'one and only future' has both conceptual limitations and political implications, and in particular hampers attempts to envision and create 'alternative and preferred futures'.

While it is commonly thought that futures studies is an attempt to predict the future based on extrapolation from present day trends, this is only one of at least **five** epistemological approaches to futures research described below. The first three approaches to futures studies are identified by Inayatullah as the predictive, the cultural-interpretive and the critical. (Inayatullah 1990) A fourth approach to research in futures studies is identified by Wildman and termed 'futuring'. (Wildman and Inayatullah 1996) This applied approach to futures research may be seen as a development from the cultural and critical perspectives to futures 'praxis', that is, creating one's future through active visioning and action research. This is an empowerment approach that introduces transformational futures processes, and is also identified by other futurists. (Boulding 1988; Hutchinson 1996; Slaughter 1996) This empowerment oriented approach to futures research will be further discussed later. **Finally, a fifth and newly emerging futures approach, referred to as 'integral futures' is being developed by Richard Slaughter and others at the Australian Foresight Institute. (Slaughter 2003) It is based on the leading-edge thinking found in Ken Wilber's integral framework and his approach to the evolution of consciousness. (Wilber 2000b; Wilber 2003) Wilber's use of the term 'integral' draws on the work of cultural -historian Jean Gebser who in turn drew inspiration from Sri Aurobindo Ghose who coined the term 'integral education' in India in the 1950s. The integral approach is aligned to a more general movement to move thinking beyond narrow 'instrumental rationality' to more integrated, transrational, higher and more spiritually based forms of thinking. (Gidley 2004)**

One of the characteristics of analysis from the Futures Studies field is that it provides new perspectives on 'received wisdom' by unpacking the present view of things. There are numerous tools and methods for the analysis of data from a futures studies perspective. In addition, a comprehensive knowledge base has emerged over the last decade to resource the futures field of research.(Inayatullah 2000; Inayatullah and Wildman 1998; Slaughter and Inayatullah 2000; Slaughter 1996) Methods include emerging issues analysis (identifying issues before they become trends), visioning and backcasting (making action plans in reverse from your envisioned preferred futures), causal layered analysis (described below) and scenario building among others. The role of futures studies in the fields of youth research and education takes several forms and is more fully explicated elsewhere. (Gidley 2002a)

A Causal Layered Analysis

"Often individuals write and speak from differing perspectives. Some are more economic, others are concerned with the big picture; some want real practical institutional solutions, others want changes in consciousness. CLA endeavours to find spaces for all of them." (Inayatullah 2000)

According to Inayatullah, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is based on two key assumptions:

- that the way we frame a problem changes the policy solution and the actors responsible for creating transformation. (Inayatullah 2000)

There are numerous ways that we can frame the issue of young people and suicidality, and how we do this will dramatically change the part they may play in any solution.

- the second assumption underpinning CLA is that there are different levels of reality and ways of knowing.

While most conventional problem solving processes focus on the horizontal layer (What is the problem? What is the solution? Who can solve it? Where can we get more information about the problem?), CLA also includes a vertical dimension to problem solving which is explained below. While not ignoring the value of the horizontal focus, CLA uses it as a way of broadening the analysis within the different vertical layers eg through scenario development.

The remainder of this section of the paper will discuss the issue of youth suicide and what can be done to prevent it by working through the vertical layers or levels used in CLA analysis. These levels involve:

1. The Litany layer
2. The Social causes layer
3. The Worldview analysis layer
4. The 'Grand Myth' and Metaphor layer

1. The Litany layer is the official public description of the issue.

This first layer is generally limited to descriptive, quantitative information on a problem or issue. In conventional, empirically-oriented futures research it focuses on statistical trends and the assumption that 'trend is destiny'. Different aspects of a problem are often seen as disconnected, analysis is limited or non-existent, and the extent of problems are also exaggerated, especially by the media, so that a feeling of helplessness or apathy arises.

The litany layer of the youth suicide problem looks at rising incidence and also the related statistics, eg growing mental illness rates. The most comprehensive study of the mental health status of young Australians (12-24) was undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Well-being in 1999. Comparative studies (OECD countries) indicate that when the figures for all mental health disorders are combined (including ADHD, Conduct Disorder, Depression, Anxiety, etc), as many as 18-22% of children and adolescents suffer from one or more of these disorders. (Raphael 2000) Depression itself is becoming of major concern in Australia, where it has been found that "up to 24% of young people will have suffered at least one episode of major depression by the time they are 18 years old.(Bashir and Bennett

2000) Youth suicides among young males (15-24) in Australia have doubled in the past twenty years, though this appears to have plateaued. (Mitchell 2000) The extent of the problem can be overwhelming if the analysis remains at this level.

Solutions based on this layer are usually sought from Governments and are usually short-term (eg. the Government doesn't do enough). Yet even in terms of the litany, more is needed to discover what the interrelationships are between the various aspects of the problems. To further explore the causes we need to go to the next layer.

2. Social causes layer, includes economic, political, historical factors.

This layer of analysis may also be referred to as the policy layer of analysis. Interpretation is given to quantitative data and causes are often seen as economic or political, eg lack of finances or resources, or the result of changes in Government and hence policy orientation. (Inayatullah 2000) Socio-cultural, and historical factors are also identified as causes and contested as such. The following four factors represent forces of change that have occurred in our society over recent decades, accelerating the breakdown of society 'as it was' particularly in regard to the poor enculturation and resultant alienation of young people:

- Individualism versus community connection
- The colonization of imagination
- The secularization of culture
- Environmental degradation

Individualism versus Community Connection

The current age of the 'I' which celebrates self-centered egoism, began in the 60s and 70s with the recognition of (and rebellion against) the injustices involved in the long-term cultural dominance of the 'wealthy white male'. The various movements for 'liberation' and human rights (feminism, gay, black and indigenous rights movements) set in motion a process where rights began to dominate responsibilities. While not wanting to undermine the gains that have been made in terms of equity and human rights, in the process, the needs of family and community have often been compromised. While the development of the 'I' or Ego is an important stage in the evolution of human nature linked to our destiny to discover freedom, it is also evident that the human ego is a double edged sword. The striving of individual human beings throughout the 20th century for self-identity, and equal rights has culminated in what David Elkind called the 'me decade' of the 90s. (Elkind 1981) In the 19th century, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was aware of the dangers of the 'free human ego' unless it had some spiritual grounding:

The most tremendous thing that has been granted to man is: the choice, freedom. And if you desire to save it and preserve it there is only one way: in the very same second unconditionally and in complete resignation to give it back to God, and yourself with it... (Campbell 1968)

This is not to say that we all need to follow some monotheistic religion, but rather to acknowledge the Spiritual presence behind our individual 'I'. With the breakdown of families and other social structures (linked also to the shift in male-female power relationships) we are seeing an unprecedented fragmentation of the social glue without which young people are rudderless in their social orientation. Is it just coincidence that the symptoms observed today among young people, such as homelessness, alienation, and depression have increased during the same few decades? By contrast this individualism inherent in the west, strikes a strong chord with youth in their striving for their own identities. (Gidley 2001a)

The Colonization of Imagination

Over roughly the same period of time, the education of the imaginations of children and youth has changed from the nourishment of oral folk and fairy tales to the poisoning of interactive electronic nightmares. Since the advent of TV, and Video game parlors, followed by the use of computer games (originally designed to train and desensitize soldiers before sending them off to the killing fields), western children and youth have been consistently and exponentially exposed to violent images. (Grossman, Degaetano and Grossman 1999) Toys once made by mothers, fathers or grandparents, from simple available materials have given way in this 'wealthy consumer age' to what are very often grotesque toys given ready-made to young children. These are not food for the souls of children but the food for nightmares. The imagination like the intellect needs appropriate content to develop in a healthy manner. Research has shown that when young people receive powerful, positive images in their education, it can help them to envision strong positive futures which they feel empowered to create. (Gidley 2002b)

Is it surprising then that over the past decade in particular, symptoms have appeared among young people (particularly in the US, but also other 'developed' countries) of ever increasing violence and suicide. The American Medical Association and American Academy of Paediatrics have recently made a joint statement that "The prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization towards violence in real life". (Callahan and Cubbin 2000) Most of the research on suicide and suicidal ideation show strong links with depression and also hopelessness about the future. (Abramson, Metalsky and Alloy 1989; Beck et al. 1985; Cole 1989) By contrast, young people educated with an eye to the development of a healthy, positive imagination are not disempowered, thereby obviously retaining some hope, in spite of their concerns about the future. (Gidley 1997)

The Secularization of Culture

A third major change, beginning with the European Enlightenment, is the secularization of society. This has accelerated over the past few decades, with the dominance of Western materialism, particularly through globalization. This triumph of secular science over spiritual science, coinciding with the widespread crisis of values reflected in postmodernism as a 'belief' system' has resulted in a dominant world culture which although ostensibly Christian, is in practice amoral. The egoism that brings greed in its wake, the economic rationalism that denudes politics of the principals of social justice, the secularization of education (leading to a loss of the values dimension), the death of churches as inspiring community organizations

and ultimately the cultural fascism that leads to ethnic cleansing, terrorism and counter-terrorism are all symptoms of societies that have lost connections with moral, ethical and spiritual values.

The resultant symptoms in young people are a cynical 'don't care' attitude, loss of purpose and meaning, and a 'dropping out' of mainstream society, assisted of course by the high levels of youth unemployment. (Gidley and Wildman 1996a; Gidley and Wildman 1996b) On the other hand the counter point to this is that many young people are beginning to recognize this void and seek to find meaning through a search for spiritual values.

'I continue to be impressed by the vitality and strength of youth spirituality, and its astonishing appearance in the midst of a secular education system that does not encourage it, a religious system that does not understand it, and a materialist society that gives no official sanction to it.' P. 175. (Tacey 2003)

Environmental Degradation

Finally the culture that has dominated the global environmental agenda, valuing private and corporate profit, over community or planet, has been responsible for the systematic and pervasive pollution of our earth, air and water. What message we might wonder has this given to our youth? In addition, while the scientific/medical solution of chemical approaches to mental as well as physical illnesses provides 'newer and better drugs' for depression, hyperactivity and anxiety, the numbers of depressed adolescents and children described as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) continue to climb. (Seligman 1995; Stanley 2002) Is it any wonder that in this unnatural world so many youth are turning to drug abuse to escape, or to alcohol binges to drown their sorrows. Conversely, the environmental awareness of youth is high with 'green futures' being almost universally present in their preferred futures scenarios. (Gidley 2002b; Hicks 1996)

Solutions at this 2nd layer, to the problems of youth mental illness and suicide risk might involve developing policies which would help to get more counsellors into schools, better back-up mental health services, and more effective therapies. This policy layer is crucial to improvements in services for young people however, if the new policies are limited by a worldview that comes from the industrial era, it may have little meaning to the young people themselves. Unless the research that underlies policy formation for young people is developed from the same worldview that young people themselves hold, the policies will in effect be meaningless to them.

The next level of analysis will demonstrate how the underlying worldview or the dominant discourse can influence meaning. This provides a deeper point of leverage for change.

3. Deeper socio-cultural analysis, concerned with structure and discourse and the worldview that supports it.

'A culture that has lost its shared cosmology no longer provides any emotional or psychological shelter beneath which youth can enjoy their youthfulness.' p. 177. (Tacey 2003)

This layer requires an investigation of the deeper (often unconscious) assumptions underlying the theories and policies that we develop. Many parts of Australian society are still based on a worldview that comes from the industrial era. Although there have been dramatic changes in the fabric of society over the past few decades, there are remnants of the 'factory model' still operating in many workplaces and schools. And as Dr Fiona Stanley points out, we still have primarily a 'repair-shop' model of health and welfare services. (Stanley 2002)

Assumptions underlying the industrial worldview are:

- human nature is a mechanistic process
- materialism is a substitute for God (with consumerism as the religious practice)
- the scientific model, (with its specialisation and segmentation) is the acceptable style of thinking

The four factors discussed under the previous layer of analysis represent forces of change that have emanated from the western materialist cultural worldview over recent decades. The scientific thinking that underpins Western culture follows both the empiricist and Cartesian traditions that developed during the European Enlightenment. More recently referred to as instrumental rationality it is a reductionist, materialistic mode of thinking which excludes such diverse ways of knowing as imagination, inspiration, intuition. As the knowledge system of the technologically advanced western culture its global dominance of other cultures discounts the mythic, aesthetic, subjective, spiritual, traditional ways of knowing of most of the earth's cultures. Based as it is on a view of human nature that lacks a spiritual dimension (divorcing psychology from theology, science from ethics), all further fragmentations stem from this inherent tendency to segregate rather than integrate.

And while specialisation may be quite appropriate in some scientific domains it can lead to a fragmentation of response in the social and welfare domains that can prevent solutions to complex social problems. A new worldview is being called for that takes a more holistic and integral approach to solving problems. Recently, several youth researchers have argued for new multi-disciplinary research approaches, across the separate traditions of health and education. (Stanley 2002; Wyn 2002)

'Integral' means 'inclusive, balanced, comprehensive' ...The integral approach does not advocate one particular value system over another, but simply helps leaders assemble the most comprehensive overview available, so that they can more adequately and sanely address the pressing issues now facing all of us'. (Wilber 2003)

Solutions: To effectively analyse and work out solutions to problems at this level, we need to change our way of seeing the world by adopting a new, more effective or relevant worldview. This would involve finding models for education and welfare that transcend the factory and 'repair shop' models; and views of human nature that go beyond mechanistic views to those which foster human potential and the evolution of consciousness. This would lead to a re-framing of categories such as mental health and well-being. I believe this reframing would involve de-linking the discipline of psychology from the medico-clinical model, to include a greater focus on human potential and transformation. This touches on aspects of transpersonal psychology and also the spiritual emergence literature. (Gidley 2002c; Grof and Grof 1989) More far-reaching is Robert Sardello's pioneering work in spiritual psychology, which draws on Rudolf Steiner's teachings, and attempts to put the psyche (soul) back into psychology. In his view the soul is the bridge between the body and Spirit, and will never be understood without acknowledgement of this spiritual aspect.

A 'sea-change' or 'paradigm shift' is needed if we are to seriously address the complexity of the issues at stake and perhaps this is already beginning. This 'shift of paradigm' is what we are dealing with at the 3rd level of CLA. The impetus for such changes tends to come more from philosophers and cultural analysts than from policy-makers themselves. A new kind of integral thinking (one which includes the spiritual dimension) is needed for this, where solutions may include reframing education, not as training for work, but as the development of wisdom and activism to create a wiser world. (Scott 2000; Wilber 2000a)

4. Layer of Grand Myth/Story and Metaphor that Supports the Culture.

'The lack of hope (of youth) for the future reflects the mistakes of the past, the problems of the present and the challenges of the future. But it also suggests a failure of vision, a failure to conceive a future that is appealing and plausible and able to serve as a focus and source of inspiration.' (Eckersley 1996)

This fourth and deepest layer of analysis is usually invisible to most processes of change. However, it is a crucial one to become conscious of because in a sense it is its very invisibility that gives it such power. In relation to understanding young people's depression, hopelessness and suicidality it is imperative to dig beneath the surface. What is the deep story that young people are telling themselves about our world and the future?

'Young people are especially able to see through the official myths and stories of society, and to debunk them as baseless and without credibility. It is precisely this lack of belief in the surface that acts as a catalyst to the spirituality revolution... The surface layer of socially constructed meaning is wearing very thin, and appears unconvincing even to the youngest observer. The myth and stories that formerly propped up our rational universe, such as belief in social progress, humanism, liberal democracy, have been exposed as fake or phoney, and no longer compel commitment or belief.' (Tacey 2003)

As discussed earlier in the futures research, young people's images of the future have been colonised by a media-driven 'one and only probable future' which is negative and frightening. The resultant 'culture of hopelessness' could partially explain the increases in both depression and suicide. It is also evident in the youth futures research (though only some are able to articulate it) that young people do sense a spiritual vacuum in their society. (Gidley 2003)

'The problem of youth suicide is intimately connected with the spiritual side of youth experience, and when meaning or truth cannot be found, lives can be broken or lost by the terrible discovery that the spiritual vacuum in society has not been filled by a personal encounter with meaning.' P. 179. (Tacey 2003)

When the issue of youth suicidality is analysed from this level it is obvious that the increasing levels of depression etc, represent for many a disenchantment with the world they are inheriting from their elders. It is also suggested that young people are not given sufficient opportunity to try to imagine a more positive preferred future which they could work towards creating. (Gidley 2000; Gidley 2001b) They are deeply concerned about what they see as a lack of values and ethics in politics and the corporate business world. Young people are idealist when given a chance to express themselves. They want a clean, green world, they want a world with ethics and meaning, a world where everyone is treated fairly. They want work that is meaningful and where they are treated with respect and valued. Yet they expect the future to be full of their fears. How can this be transformed?

"When I try to imagine how I would like the future to be, I tend to romanticise, to idealise. I concoct a perfect world in my mind. A world filled with love, with peace, with happiness. A world free from prejudice and discrimination, from hate and destruction, from sickness and starvation, from poverty and crime. A world that would epitomise all my hopes and dreams yet contain none of my fears." (Hunter 2002)

Creating New Mythologies of Hope for Cultural Renewal

In summary, at the deepest level of analysis, the issue of youth suicide is symptomatic of a cultural malaise at the heart of Western materialist culture. Solutions at this level demand no less than to begin the conscious process of cultural transformation.

How does one transform a culture, especially one that has become a colonizing mono-culture, homogenizing diversity in its path?

There are many ways to attempt to transform a culture and all are fraught with contention:

1. Directly through structural change such as reform and/or cultural revolution
2. Directly through taking charge of the enculturation processes of the young people as Singapore has tried to do
3. Directly through transforming the education system as some alternative approaches attempt (Steiner, Montessori, **Neohumanist, Integral**)
4. Indirectly through making subtle gradual inroads via literature and the arts

5. Indirectly through telling ourselves and our young people different stories about the future and encouraging them to create and enact their own personal futures stories.

The successes and failures of the first four are well known. The fifth utilizes the processes of future studies, to facilitate for and with young people, a cultural renewal, inspired by the hopes and dreams of these young people. Research from the youth futures field suggests that young people can be empowered by processes that allow them to create new stories of hope for the future. The possibility that the failure of the 'industrial myth' may underlie the future fears and disempowerment of youth, provides the motivation for the creation of new myths, new stories to inspire our youth and indeed, our culture to go forward. (Beare 1996; Berry 1988; Campbell 1968; Tacey 1995)

The task at this level is to work from the imagination, especially involving young people to revision their world. What metaphors can be used? Is knowledge a commodity or is it sacred? Is health just about 'not being sick', or is it about aspiring to feelings of joy, happiness and hope? Visions of preferred futures, developed into detailed scenarios, coupled with action plans, can be the basis for transforming not just education and welfare, but the whole culture.

Empowerment focused futures studies

'Empowerment oriented' futures research is one of the methods of change at this level. The application of the futures studies theory that envisioning positive futures can be empowering is still in its infancy, particularly with young people. Some tentative claims have been made in some earlier research by the author with marginalised youth, that such positive futures visioning processes can also be encouraging and even empowering to young people. (Gidley 1997; Gidley 1998b; Wildman, Gidley and Irwin 1997). However, this research was very exploratory in nature.

In addition, three Australian youth futures researchers in three separate studies over the past five years have made similar claims (Hart 2002; Head 2002; Stewart 2002).

A recent study in a rural NSW high school tested the possibility that the futures processes discussed above might even have psychological implications in reducing clinical levels of hopelessness in young people. A four session intervention program, called 'Creating Positive Futures', targeted the negative images of the future among the students and attempted to promote more positive images of the future. The most important finding was that the images of the future had become significantly more positive after the intervention. There was also a marked improvement in the hopelessness scores of the males. Although a pilot study, this has important implications given that suicide among young males is four times that of young women and also that adolescent boys are considered a difficult group to influence in terms of preventative and clinical interventions. (Gidley 2001b) More research is recommended to further test these findings.

That the strengthened and enriched imagination is a key aspect of action oriented futures thinking is also suggested by Boulding who suggests a 'possible relation among vividness or concreteness of imagery, intensity of affect and action readiness'. (Boulding 1988) Furthering the relationships between the processes involved in envisioning the future, the capabilities involved in story-telling, and motivation to change in our present sphere of action, Boulding's colleague Ziegler made the following statement:

'Make no mistake: envisioning the future is about the making of new myths, is about telling stories about the future that compel us to change our ways of doing and being in the multiple action-setting within which we organise ourselves.'
(Ziegler 1991)

Storying a New Culture

'They (young people) are hungry for enchantment given, not by society or its institutions, but by the spirit and its promise of new life. On the other side of post-modern malaise and disappointment is the gradual recovery of hope and the capacity to dream.' (Tacey 2003)

While the research above suggests that positive futures images and stories can be empowering at the individual level, some researchers take a far-reaching view that creating new cultural stories can begin to transform our culture. (Bussey 2002) Making theoretical links between the story-making process and Gestalt patterning processes, educationist, Hedley Beare refers to the stories and myths that tacitly guide us as templates or patterns of thinking which become 'motifs' for our actions. Recognising the extent to which stories give meaning and coherence to our lives he cautions about what stories we give our children, arguing that (even the tacit ones) are 'carriers of meaning of who we think we are'. (Beare 1996)

Taking a futuristic perspective on the value of story and myth for our culture, futurist Jenson claims that western society is currently moving beyond the 'industrial society' to what he calls the 'dream society'. He argues that the value currently given to economics and hard technologies will be replaced by a new set of ethical, social and spiritual values with storytelling being a highly valued skill in a wide range of professions, from advertiser to teacher. (Jenson 1996) The relevance of story and myth to the field of psychology, has been richly developed in the dream work of Carl Jung, James Hillman and Robert Sardello. (Jung 1990; Reason and Hawkins 1988; Sardello 1995) Keeping the story thread of human culture alive through a synthesis of the fields of archaeology, anthropology, psychology, mythology and cosmology, Joseph Campbell induces us to contact our own 'mythogenetic zone' to develop new creative mythologies for the future. (Campbell 1968; Campbell 1988)

Visions of a Transformed Culture which Fosters Hope

'...we should pay close attention to developments in youth and popular spirituality, because in and through our youth we see most clearly the stirrings of the zeitgeist (spirit of the times)'. P. 175. (Tacey 2003)

We need to go beyond the litany of problems and issues that surround youth suicide. We need to go beyond social, economic and psychological 'causes' to examine the materialistic worldview that Western culture is based on. It is not hard to see that for many young people, it does not inspire them with hope for their futures. And yet to attempt to spiritually transform culture, requires dealing with the issues that Tacey grapples with in his book. As he states, this does not mean a return to religiosity, or a flight into 'new age fancies'. Any awakening within our culture to a new spiritual mythology would need to draw on the wisdom found in the great spiritual traditions, referred to as the 'perennial tradition. If such a process were to engage rather than alienate youth it would also need to understand their worldviews and the metaphors they use to describe their world and their emerging views of spirituality.

All this would need to occur in a climate of freedom from dogma. Such new stories of a more spiritual culture could talk to each other and dialogue a new pluralistic worldview where all possible ways of knowing would be encouraged at all levels of education, including university learning. This would involve a revaluing of the arts, the practical skills, and contemplative processes as being of equal value with the rational, in contributing to a more integral knowledge approach for the future. Such an idealistic, youth-driven vision for the future of western culture could contribute to creating a world that would go beyond symptom treatment into a place of hope, renewal, potential and creativity.

Hope can't survive in a world that believes it of only made of matter. Hope thrives when we realize that all physical matter is supported by a spiritual world.

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