

It's Time to Be Bold But Not Attack Building a New Model of Education

An interview with Dr. Don Beck¹

By Nick Drummond and Mats Edin, Nordic Integral
May 12, 2004

www.nordicintegral.com

Summary

Following Don Beck's exciting announcement of the Copenhagen Centre for Human Emergence (www.humanemergence.org), Mats Edin and Nick Drummond met with him afterwards to discuss their strategy for, "*catalysing the emergence of second tier thinking in Scandinavia and more specifically the Øresund region*" using the field of education as a leverage point.

As Mats Edin expresses, we are now seeing "*Problems like suicide, self-mutilation, eating disorders, sexual abuse, violence, abuse, attacks, bomb threats and now even students planning massacres in school.*" This necessitates a new educational model because, as Don Beck explains, "*You're dealing with the symptoms and not being able to get at the underlying structural dynamics and this is producing misfitness. It's like the whole system is out of sync and not meeting the needs of people.*" And in discussing their course of action Don Beck uses a quote from R. Buckminster Fuller; "*You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.*" And so rather than fight battles, ...*build the model that is more complex and more appealing and begin to lay it out using examples.*"

So what should this new model of education be called? Don Beck suggests, "*Reality-Based Education might be a good concept as it has a movement to it, it has a character, and it has contours. That's what it takes for meme spread to occur. You need to start to think about this as a package of models that practically work in schools today.*"

To create leverage Don Beck suggests an annual Summit on the Scandinavian Child, where a concept like "*enabling the emergence of the intelligences of the whole community*" could be brought into focus giving a much broader gauge to understanding how we are doing and who is responsible for creating that and enabling that to happen. Because, "*basically education has to be a local thing, a community responsibility. And ideally it should be done using what we call a MeshWORK approach, because it has to include home, church, school, community, parents, sports, all those things. When we only limit the question of education to what schools and teachers do and fail to realise that they, while very important, are only a part of what impacts upon children we are missing a huge part of the picture and thus the solution. Thus to hold schools and teachers responsible for the variables and dynamics that are impacting upon children and in effect are coming in from all aspects of that community is pretty unrealistic. So the question needs to become: How can we tap into the collective intelligence of the whole community in order to fully accept responsibility for enabling the emergence of our children?*"

¹ Dr. Don Edward Beck can be contacted at email: drbeck@attglobal.net, www.spiraldynamics.net.

1. Catalysing a large-scale shift in leadership and responsibility

ND: Lets begin by outlining the context for what it is we plan on doing.

ME: We have our focus set on catalysing the emergence of second tier thinking in Scandinavia and more specifically the Øresund region, which includes the cities of Copenhagen and Malmö. To enable this we are planning on holding a large conference in the field of education that will involve names like Andrew Cohen, Don Beck, Ken Wilber and others. Our goal is to attract as many influential teachers, school leaders and leading thinkers and practitioners in education from Sweden and other countries as possible. We believe that the field of education, because it is of interest to everyone in our society, offers a very real possibility of catalysing a large-scale shift in leadership and thinking throughout Sweden and Denmark. Negative GREEN leadership and narcissistic thinking is like a deadly cancer prohibiting positive growth throughout our whole society and this region in particular. The more we treat the problems the worse they get. Our children and youth are suffering greatly as a result, and I fear we haven't seen the worst yet.

DB: You might think about calling it the Summit on the Scandinavian Child - which is the focus I think in what you are saying.

What I have found in working with education systems is that, until we develop a new framework outside of education itself, we trap ourselves in a particular ideology of educational views. Often you have deposits of authoritarian D-Q BLUE thinking that are very resistant to a lot of change and also feel very threatened. These are teachers and leaders who are quite convinced about this because they went to a school of education that never taught them how to change their thinking. Instead it instilled in them set systems of thinking, particular worldviews, and most often in this case the F-S GREEN meme. So it's very difficult when you begin to work in education, as you both know, to get some changes in thinking and leadership.

2. Accepting responsibility for enabling emergence

DB: We have number of groups in different countries that are forming new schools based on Spiral Dynamics and what we call integral education. In fact we just designed one last year in Boise Idaho USA, another in León Mexico and one is now forming in Vancouver Canada. Also, the people in Vancouver are associated with Andrew Cohen. So there is a lot of cross-fertilization occurring and new networks are being formed that can quickly spread knowledge about integral education, as it is being gained, around the globe.

What I have also learned is that basically education has to be a local thing, a community responsibility. And ideally it should be done using what we call a MeshWORK approach, because it has to include home, church, school, community, parents, sports, all those things. When we only limit the question of education to what schools and teachers do and fail to realise that they, while very important, are only a part of what impacts upon children we are missing a huge part of the picture and thus the solution. Thus to hold schools and teachers responsible for the variables and dynamics that are impacting upon children and in effect are coming in from *all* aspects of that community is pretty unrealistic. So the question needs to become: How can we tap into the collective intelligence of the whole community in order to fully accept responsibility for enabling the emergence of our children?

ME: Wow!

3. A MeshWORK to mobilise collective intelligence

DB: I know it's probably overstated, but there is some truth to the old expression, "It takes a whole village to rear a child." A MeshWORK is a way to mobilise all the forces and all the dynamics within the community and holding them responsible for the sake of the children.

I'll often say to a group, as I did here this visit in Copenhagen, "What if the only children surviving, because of some strange viral reason, were Danish kids? What if the only future of this species of ours would be the future of the children in Denmark? Will that change at all the priority that people here would place in children? Wouldn't you say, 'Oh my goodness we have to develop doctors and lawyers and technicians and everything?' Wouldn't such a dramatic crisis cause us to focus more realistically on what we are doing?"

In effect this sort of dramatic scenario is acting like a reframing event for how we choose to see our own lives. It can help us to choose to focus on what's really important and what really works – otherwise we have a school and a community that just keeps doing the same and repeating itself over and over with no sense of emergency, higher purpose or vision.

Another thing that I have learnt is that we only think about education in terms of different fields of knowledge rather than thinking about it as also enabling the emergence of intelligences and higher levels of thinking and caring. In this sense there ought to be people responsible for the intelligences of the whole population within a community – so that the positive forces within the community are working together to complexify the creative intelligence of the whole community i.e. the leading edge of it's citizens at all levels throughout the community.

As one example, more and more we have older citizens with time on their hands. Here is a vast resource, a vast intelligence, which often we neglect and see as a burden. And so a concept of *enabling the emergence of the intelligences of the whole community* gives a much broader gauge to understanding how we are doing and who is responsible for creating that and enabling that to happen, and this can be brought into focus at annual summits on the child. Developing this collectively responsibly in the community is vitally important because experience has already shown that the cultural environmental forces surrounding the child, such as what's in the newspaper and what's on television, are probably more powerful than what happens in the classroom.

So if we can find ways to impact on all of those forces surrounding the child, then we could do those things that ought to be done. But we simply haven't. Our vision has been limited to thinking that the problem is about the school. I'm not arguing that that's not important, but if we shifted from just being concerned about education to now focusing on the whole multiple intelligences with the community, then I think that would be a very healthy change and focus.

ME: Exactly. Also by showing breakthroughs and living examples in the field of education we will be also exposing the Mean GREEN meme and the myths that it generates. We need to have more and more teachers experience this for themselves, "Yes there is a stop here that we have created. We are blocking emergence. We aren't accepting responsibility". It's very hard to make these myths seen and visible without showing concrete examples. This is where a real opening needs to occur. And because negative GREEN goes against the structures that promote natural hierarchy and emergence parents and teachers, who are on the front line in facilitating child development, are becoming desperate for solutions. Yet they are being given GREEN solutions that are exacerbating the problems.

ND: In a sense our education system is setting up the crisis conditions necessary to catalyse change to a more complex level of thinking within the whole community.

4. It's time to build the new models that make the present order obsolete

DB: That's right, thank God for the crisis! I keep using that R. Buckminster Fuller quotation; "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." And so rather than fight battles – because often you have to fight on their terms and they are imbedded in power positions – that by building the model that is more complex and more appealing and beginning to lay it out using examples, that's how I think, in terms of transformation, you begin to soften their negativity, because in terms of the change process the capacities for positive change within the community are already present – they just need to be recognised and facilitated. The earlier needs have been met in terms of, "the Huns are not at the gates", and there's dissonance, which is necessary. There's been the attempt to recover, on the part of the status quo, and their solutions are only making things worse. So what's necessary now is insight and when you build a new model like The Scandinavian Summit on the Child, how can one not support that? And then you theoretically bring together representatives for the intelligences of the whole community. You bring in the healthcare people to report on how children are doing. You bring in school counsellors and psychotherapists: What kind of emotional difficulties are children having? You bring in law enforcement people: What are the crime patterns you are seeing in kids today? You don't just bring in educators. You do a Vital Signs Monitor. You also want to do a CultureSCAN to ask: How are children and citizens doing? Because no one brings these people, this kind of information, and these maps and models together. But when you bring these together you will begin to see the crisis points.

ND: Bringing together the data, maps and the people?

DB: That's it, all the indicators that you can get your hands on. I'm sure there is enough resource around to enable this, but it simply hasn't been brought together in a way that can be leveraged.

ME: In my job I'm responsible for some 4 000 children and youth, 8 000 parents, and 800 teachers. We are three psychologists – one is presently off work, one is working part-time and I am on my own working full-time taking care of what is happening on the very edge of the toughest problems we are facing in the one of the largest districts in the city of Malmö. Problems like suicide, self-mutilation, eating disorders, sexual abuse, violence, abuse, attacks, bomb threats and now even students planning school massacres. If we can't show school leaders, parents and teachers the verticality and the levels of thinking, and moral devolvement, I can't see how we are going to be able to change anything for the better. I'm standing there pushing this edge and reaching out to bigger groups of people to get them to recognise that there is a need, there is a map, there is compass and there are tools. Because it's literally impossible to stand there and take care of all those people in desperate need. It's like taking care of one and you produce ten more at the same time.

DB: What you are seeing here are all kinds of BETA signs ["something is wrong"] as well as some becoming GAMMA ["all hell is breaking loose"]. You're dealing with the symptoms and not being able to get at the underlying structural dynamics.

ME: Exactly.

DB: And this is producing misfitness. It's like the whole system is out of sync and not meeting the needs of people. The kids are indicating this clearly in their destructive behaviour. So there needs to be a MeshWORKS design which aligns the whole Spiral, not least of course the BLUE meme. I'm sure you have things like Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. I guess churches are pretty dormant here so there is nothing that is really taking that place for positive BLUE in your society and culture.

ME: No, that's true, some sports, but it's mostly coming from the ORANGE meme. We have an urgent task to identify and inject healthy BLUE back into our society.

DB: The other thing that I've learned in working with teachers is showing how to cross-fertilize teaching methods. For example, my sports coaches have learnt how to teach physics while their teaching about basketball. And my basketball coaches have learnt how to teach mathematics.

5. How do we enable emergence from a natural design perceptive?

ND: We desperately need to bring together this kind of knowledge. At the moment we are being called in to navigate through the coming crisis and are using second their models. And while the work we are doing is generating results we want to be at the other end of the spectrum were we are designing and aligning natural learning systems that facilitate positive emergence.

The negative GREEN crisis has now created the possibility for educators to realise the need to change the level of their thinking, attitudes and values and say, "Wow, I have never thought about that possibility." But of course the next step is to create MeshWORK designs. And that opens up the whole question of: Can we identify within our culture and align examples of healthy PURPLE, RED, BLUE, ORANGE and GREEN? Because we've now got to start looking into the question of: How do we enable emergence along the Spiral from a natural designs perceptive?

6. Without purpose children flounder and loose sense of self

DB: We heard a good example of this today where some of the early school grades in Denmark engage in playing so called "Knight games" and are in effect doing what is really a healthy form of symbolic RED for four and five-year-olds. So there are certainly some good examples in Denmark. So one thing is to scout for these positive things that are already happening in your society and publicise and show why they're working well. I'm sure that there are a lot of these examples around but they are isolated and fragmented, and really not known about elsewhere or put into the context of an overarching model for enabling emergence. I think it takes this particular crisis you are describing in order to begin to open up for new possibilities. And certainly I believe children need purpose because without purpose they flounder and loose a positive sense of self and get drawn off into self-destructive behaviours.

ME: That's so true. I talk to a lot of children and youth around these questions and tell them, "You are very much needed and you can actually help". I push parents to answer, "Why would you let a ten-year-old decide as to when he or she is going to return home?" I ask the parents to ask their kids: "What have you been doing to make society better?" Because it is vitally important, as you say, that children of all ages and adults experience actually doing something felt to be of deep value and that instils in them a sense of purpose. Because without this deeper context their experience is one of being on a permanent vacation from any deeper form of social responsibility.

ND: We see many examples of this where the level of moral maturity and social responsibility being expressed by teachers and school leaders is often very immature.

Getting them to broaden and deepen the context of who they are and what they are doing is a necessary challenge. As it is now the predominant GREEN meme is having us focus on a very individualistic and narcissistic agenda, the context becomes extremely small, which leads to stagnation and the problems we are experiencing.

ME: As the saying goes, "An idle mind is the devils workshop."

DB: The sooner young minds can get engaged in developing a sense of purpose the better. And actually I'm just amazed at how many young kids are ready and willing to do that. As one example, I was recently involved with a group of high school level students in Texas and engaged with them in a futures activity. I gave them the task to scout out the following scenario; "You'll probably hit the workforce in the year 2015. Now go out on the Internet and find out what will be the kind of jobs and what kind of environment in the year 2015 and then come back and tell us what the world will look like, because it's your future." That kind of purpose driven activity is very helpful in getting a sense of dedication to the task and wanting to sacrifice self now to obtain something latter which is what you are trying to activate in BLUE.

ND: And I guess that same process has to start with the school leaders and teachers who themselves need to sense this higher purpose, context and responsibility for what it is they are doing and creating?

DB: Definitely, because I think there is already a lot of understanding amongst leaders that something new needs to be done, because of declining birth rates and changes in population patterns. But once again because GREEN has difficulty accepting BLUE there is no sense of purpose or enough "sacrifice self now to obtain latter" thinking to actually do anything. As an example, I've been aghast to hear about what is happening in Denmark with the influx of militant Muslim groups, representing hard core BLUE Islam, trying to recruit Danish youth, separating men and women and attacking democracy. The response from the right wing Danish political parties shows that that memetic cancer is moving inside here and it has to be recognised and dealt with.

ND: It would seem that the GREEN cultures in both Sweden and Denmark are setting up the conditions for this kind of a crisis to happen.

DB: That's right.

ND: Because without healthy BLUE leaders and environments to attract and inspire our youth we risk having them attracted to these more extreme negative expressions of BLUE.

DB: Yes that is a very real risk.

7. Students need a positive hierarchy to inspire them

ME: Nick and I recently gave a lecture for teachers and PhD students at Malmö University on Spiral Dynamics and Integral Education. The professor for the faculty started off being pretty ambivalent but by the end seemed to be intrigued by what we were doing and achieving. He commented from his own research that teachers have a false idea about what students need in

terms of leadership. Teachers adopt a way of teaching and leading which in effect deprives their students of flow, happiness and purpose. The teachers go with least resistance so that their leadership style lacks the ability to create any kind of positive resistance, any kind of positive hierarchy. We praise consensus democracy so much so that when a teacher dares to show authority they are criticised by their colleagues as being fascists. Students also question the teachers authority by asking, "Hey do we have to do this?" and the teacher answers, "Okay, no you don't have to do it. Just do this *first one*." I see it in schools all the time – like there is no one on the edge any more. No one is really inspired. It's like there is no limit to what can actually happen when our youth become inspired by negative BLUE. There are no barriers. And with this example concerning Muslim youth, it's like a BLUE vacuum is being filled resulting in Muslim extremists and potential terrorists within our own borders. Because of negative GREEN no one is being really inspired and everybody is becoming depressed.

ND: No one is caring enough to take responsibility.

DB: It's called lack of vision and leadership too.

ME: Lack of vision, lack of leadership and lack of care.

ND: Some people say they are afraid but it's actually that they just don't care enough.

DB: That's that tall poppy rationalisation excuse that many make.

ME: I was interviewing a headmaster recently who commented that the education offered in Sweden to become a teacher is a total waste of time. She commented that they should be taught the subject and then go to a leadership-training course. That's it. In essence no other educational training course is going to add as much value. You must first know your subject or topic and then you learn how to lead and inspire.

8. Catalysing radical change

ND: I was contacted recently by Svansjöns resursskola, in the city of Malmö, an alternative resource school for students in year 1-6 who, because of behavioural problems, can't be placed in a regular school. It's a small school with eight students and six teachers. The students had smashed the windows, climbed onto the roof and threw stones at the teachers. They had lost complete control and the Police had to be called in. The district supervisor advised the vice principle to contact me. The school had been closed for three days when I met with them. The teachers as well as the school administrators were desperate for solutions and had no idea what they should do or what would work. They had already tried just about everything and the school had never functioned properly since its inception in 1997/98. I was able to meet the staff and after ten hours the change that happened was radically positive. For the first time I was able to use and integrate Andrew Cohen's psychology, Ken Wilber's integral models and Don Beck's work with Spiral Dynamics. I was giving them a more mature way of thinking as well as the tools that they would need. They experienced results very quickly and within two weeks the change was tangible.

DB: Have you written this up?

ND: I'm in the process. I have been interviewing the teachers, parents, vice principal, principal, the district supervisor, as well as the city district manager – gathering testimonial documentation of the change in thinking and behaviour that has happened. Starting from how they were thinking individually and as a group before the crisis, and the change that they

have undergone in their attitudes, behaviour and leadership style. They moved from a position of having lost complete control, being totally caught up in unhealthy GREEN, and not seeing any form of natural leadership hierarchy. They were seeing themselves as victims and promoting a victim culture. They now see that they have a choice, that there is a natural hierarchy, they accept and take responsibility for what they say and do, they hold students accountable for their actions as well as rewarding positive behaviour, they see how important mature leadership is and that those that lead must be the first to change their thinking to more mature levels. This has created a very dynamic process.

DB: So quickly? That's amazing!

ND: This happened without them having to partake in any special courses, programs, therapy or being on sick leave because of depression and generally costing the school a lot of time and money and still not making things any better for the kids. Had I listened to their hurt and bruised feelings and offered them a shoulder to cry they would have collapsed. Instead of giving up they choose to mature and accept responsibility. It happened very fast.

DB: That's amazing! Congratulations that's a great story. Good for you Nick!

ND: So this was the first time that I had actually seen the power of integral thinking in the field of education.

DB: Which means that's what is needed. Montessori just needs to take a back seat.

ND: Well interestingly a Montessori school, because of this same unhealthy GREEN virus, called recently also requesting help. Nordic Integral is documenting these projects and putting them into the bigger perspective we talked about earlier concerning a MeshWORKs initiative. We want to inspire some larger schools to replicate this process.

9. Reality-based education

DB: You need to language this as a movement. You need to figure out what to call it. Reality educating. Not Back to Basics for sure and it's not Whole Child [laughter]. Reality-Based Education might be a good concept as it has a movement to it, it has a character, and it has contours. That's what it takes for meme spread to occur. You need to start to think about this as a package of models that practically work in schools today. So rather than using a high-flown theoretical language you can think of a more practical way of delivering the same message.

ND: This agrees well with GREEN, because while GREEN objects to accepting someone else's theory or values as being better, it will listen to other people's practical experiences, and when these experiences carry with them important solutions that work, we have suddenly a lot of influence.

DB: Yes that's true.

ME: We want to start speaking with high-level educational administrators, politicians and journalists. A journalist from Lärartidningen, Sweden's largest weekly newspaper for teachers is doing an interview with me about our work for a coming issue in August.

10. Leaders have to lead the change process

ND: One of the things that our work is revealing is just how important leadership is for releasing this evolutionary potential for ever-higher levels of maturity. Leadership is either creating a barrier prohibiting positive change or it is facilitating a dynamic environment whereby positive emergence is being encouraged. This is the same for parents, teachers, principals or city managers. It raises the question: Are we willing to change the level of our own thinking and become a living example of this in order to inspire the people we lead? For if we are not willing to change the level of our own thinking then we are creating a barrier for change.

DB: That's right. They become part of the problem and not part of the solution. Once again my experience is that rather than attack and criticise the current system – that puts them on the defensive – create the model that has greater complexity and makes everything else obsolete or a subsystem of it and begin to talk about that. And this experience that you had is certainly a key piece of that. So Reality-Based Education becomes a movement and that is how it begins to spread in the educational context, it needs to be movement.

ME: It sure makes all the sense.

DB: You are pioneering a new field of thought about learning, about children, and about nature based on a new resource. So you quickly begin to outdate the early research with the present system by saying that there is now new research and all of us have to learn differently. And this is based on new research, new perspectives, new visions about learning and education, and a deeper understanding about the intelligences of children in order to prepare them for the 21st century. It's time to be bold – bold but not attack.

Nick Drummond and Mats Edin
May 12, 2004