

visually to your students' attention, even to those as young as eleven or twelve. Secondly, because the concept is presented within a clear and broad evolutionary narrative that encompasses astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, and the life sciences, its relevance is amplified. Additionally, as in most authentic learning, its implications will probably be better assimilated or inferred simply because the ideas are arising as part of a non-aversive activity. Indeed, the project endeavors to respect students' varied ways of learning, their affective priorities, and their aesthetic judgements. It even offers a technical, motor/kinesthetic component whereby participants are invited to skillfully craft a beautiful, shareable product. Also, the schema intentionally highlights systems theory's capacity to fortify young people's inherent emotional connectedness — their sense of kinship, "place," and belonging within their material, biological context. Moreover, it challenges their logical-analytical skills and the breadth of their vision/imagination. Certainly these capacities need exercise and development! (To this point, how many times have you, as an educator or parent, heard a child say, "Oh no, that's not a bird. That's a chicken," or "We're not animals, we're people," or the truly terrifying, "They're not humans, they're ..." — insert here the name of some ethnic, religious, or political group?) By deliberately guiding our students through an illustrated project such as this one, can we perhaps assist them — when they are neurologically ready — to transcend such misleading, rigidly concrete, overly narrow types of verbal literalism? Can we help them achieve more nuanced, well-informed kinds of thinking so that they better understand that objects typically have multiple identities simultaneously, and are themselves composed of systems? Can they learn that single words seldom suffice to explain qualities and functions within the complex webs of life, matter, and energy? International and intranational crises attest to our species' need for more of this kind of thinking — as well as much more Compassion directed not only towards our fellow humans but towards the entire "Earth Community," to borrow yet again Thomas Berry's luminous phrase. Can systems theory and pleasant yet carefully considered work with illustrations such as this one help young people better understand humanity's place within the Universe, allow them to grasp more fully the indispensable contributions that the smaller systems make to the larger ones, or enable them to recognize and appreciate the ways that these levels, and other systems within levels, continually "bring each other forth"² — i. e. prompt each other to change and coevolve in a vast and delicate ballet? It is my impression that this sort of direct educational intervention can indeed nourish youngsters' imagination and incline them towards more prosocial, proplanetary ways of thinking and acting. Perhaps it can even encourage them to become wiser, more zestful participants within Life's lovely dance. I hope you'll try this diagram and see what you think.

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Notes

1. In point of fact, the great tragedy of most institutionalized, collectivized "modern" school settings (particularly secular ones) is that they often break young children's highly creative, emotionally expansive, frequently biophilic, patterns of psychic functioning. This leaves the youngsters to stumble along with frustratingly narrow, highly verbal, anaesthetized types of concrete rationality (accompanied by a generalized disdain and distrust of intellectual pursuits and authority). To make matters worse, in adulthood, these resentful, fearful mindsets will be frequently paired with underdeveloped ethical frameworks and angry, damaged sensuality (a by-product of excessive reliance on verbal, 'rational' processing within the school.) People thus affected tend to soothe themselves with intense, competitive sociability; unhealthy foods or drugs, and vicarious emotions / distractions purchased through spectatorship — often delivered through electronic screens).

2. Maturana, Humberto R. and Varela, Francisco J. (1987). *The Tree of Knowledge*. Boston, MA: Shambala Press, 248.

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