

CHAPTER

Firestorm or Gift?

The Power of Story

The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves. One day you will be good storytellers. Never forget these obligations.

—Barry Lopez, *Crow and Weasel* (1990)

I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU A STORY.

Several years ago, one week before our residential academy was to open again for the year, I was told we had erroneously sent letters of invitation to thirty-two students on the wait list. The staff was distraught. To correct this error, they recommended a plan: call each family, fully accept responsibility, apologize profusely, and not admit the students.

It was clear the staff had agonized over this decision and wanted to make it right, but I said no to their recommendation. "Our invitation is our word," I said. "Our name and integrity are at stake. We must admit these students and welcome them as our own."

4 The Power to Transform

The news of my decision spread like wildfire. We needed everything: additional rooms, beds, mattresses, computers, and materials. The buzz, both positive and negative, drowned out any other conversation. We had one week to make it all happen.

My leadership team and I needed to know what the community was saying so we could respond quickly and honestly. I asked several staff to write down every comment they heard and send them to me anonymously. When I studied the comments, I was astounded at the emerging clarity of two dominant patterns. Unbeknown to me and the community, and even to those who made the comments, two “stories of the thirty-two” were taking shape. One I called The Firestorm (a story of impending division and fragmentation); the other I called The Gift (a story of emerging community and possibility).

This experience was an epiphany for me as a leader. Despite my awareness of the power of story to influence behavior, I had never experienced the story as it was unfolding. I had never been able to name its patterns as they were taking shape. I had never been able to create conditions that would enable the community to access its emergent stories and intervene in their manifestation by consciously choosing the story they wished to evoke and live into.

I decided at that moment to use my opening-of-the-year remarks to reveal the patterns of the two emerging stories and present them as two possibilities for the future that were now taking shape unconsciously and invisibly. I prepared two visuals: the first was entitled The Firestorm and had a drawing of a blazing fire in its center. The second was entitled The Gift and had a drawing of a gift box with an enormous bow tied on top. Surrounding each image were the numerous individual comments that told each story.

I presented these patterns to the whole community as two emerging yet to be manifested narratives over which we had complete control: *we could choose which story we wanted to live into*. We could choose The Firestorm story, and likely ensure we had a dismal year, or we could choose The Gift story, and celebrate our new students’ gifts to us and ours to them. As the year unfolded and the students thrived, it became clear that the story we had chosen was The Gift.

I later learned from many who wanted to live into The Gift story, but felt they lacked the courage to stand up to The Firestorm supporters, that the public naming of the stories as options had given

them not only a place to stand but an authentic voice in cocreating our future. In response to negative comments, they could now say, “You’re living into The Firestorm story, and that is not what I have chosen”—and know that the other understood. It became clear that when we change our stories, we change our minds.

I also learned that belonging to a community is not a private matter. We are all connected. Within a community there is no such thing as a random comment; every comment is part of an unfolding pattern or story, and the story matters. We become the story we tell ourselves about ourselves. Context is everything. Our stories become our maps.

The EMERGING NEW PARADIGM

For as long as we have gathered around the fire, we have told stories. Stories shape our consciousness and behavior, offering images, symbols, and choices for what we affirm or shun, embrace or fear, and love or hate.

Even in our data-driven culture, the power of story to crystallize an idea, mobilize behavior, and create momentum for often massive social change is disproportionate to the actual information it provides. Rather, the power of story lives beneath its language. It comes from the meaning and wisdom it conveys, the spirit it evokes, the possibilities it inspires, the hope it stirs, and the faith in new images of the future it unfolds. Timeless stories connect us to our roots, enable us to see with new eyes, and serve as a narrative bridge and invitation to explore and try out who we might become. Much of who we are comes from the narratives we live and the stories we have chosen to bring coherence to our world. We are natural storytellers.

Although we are likely unaware of it, the most powerful story we tell is our culture’s root narrative, our prevailing paradigm. We often speak of paradigms as constellations of beliefs, assumptions, ideas, and values that shape perception. But a paradigm is also that dominant and potent story that most embodies our worldview and captures our identity, purpose, and sense of belonging. This story shapes our understanding of the past, our perceptions of the present, and our vision for the future. A paradigm shift is actually a shift in a culture’s story, and it becomes visible when we become the stories we tell.

6 The Power to Transform

Storytellers wield enormous power and responsibility, especially during times of uncertainty when we seek some ground on which to stand. As storytellers, we can weave deceptive tales that diminish our collective wisdom, or we can tell stories that embody our deepest truth and awaken our deepest possibilities. Ben Okri captures this power profoundly: “Beware of the stories you read or tell; subtly, at night, beneath the waters of consciousness, they are altering your world.”¹

Our cultural ground is shifting, and our current paradigm is quietly being challenged. Tiny fault lines are appearing in what were once unquestioned policies, institutions, and lifestyles. Green buildings, alternative energy sources, integral medicine, organic farming, wetland preservation, hybrid cars, small schools, and seeking to simplify our lives are visible indications that the accelerating trajectory of acquisition and competition may no longer be all there is. It is clear that “beneath the waters of consciousness,” a deeper, more transcendent, hopeful, and empowering story of life and learning is emerging. Authoring this radical new story—and actually becoming it—can transform our cultural narrative. Grounding a new story of learning and schooling in this holistic new narrative will enable our children to reclaim their deepest selves, embrace their natural learning potentials, and reweave their connection to one another, the human family, our planet, and the web of life. The need has never been greater.

The CURRENT CONTEXT OF LEARNING and SCHOOLING

There is no more important work than the education of our children. Yet within the current conditions of schooling, and despite the efforts of the best of our teachers, our children often feel inadequate as learners and isolated and estranged from learning. Far too many emerge intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually disconnected from the natural world, their communities, and their own abundant potentials. They have little sense of meaning, wholeness, connectedness, and belonging. They are ill prepared to deeply understand and creatively resolve complex problems that cross and blur disciplinary boundaries and defy dualistic categorization. In such an imbalanced learning environment, the need for a deeper context of schooling is imperative. Learning and schooling must reconnect our children to their natural learning iden-

tity and their place in the web of life. Devoid of a sustaining human context, education cannot advance the human condition.

“What would you like to talk about?” I asked a brilliant, well-known scientist about her presentation to our students. I expected her to say that she wanted to explain her latest experiment. Instead, she replied, “I want to talk about the beauty of the cosmos, the joy and mystery of exploration, and the reason science is so cool.”

To scientists deeply engaged in understanding the awesome wonders of the universe and the beauty and harmony of the natural world, mysterious connections abound; but in “school science” there is little room for wonder, awe, or mystery. The same is true for school math, school English, school history, and other school subjects. This reductive story is grounded in a detached way of knowing that exclusively honors the objective, the analytical, and the experimentally verifiable. It views empirical observation as the most important skill and believes that “serious” study and acquiring factual knowledge require learners to disengage from their emotions in pursuit of rigorous scholarship. It holds to the premises that subjectivity endangers the pursuit of objective truth and that there is no relationship between the knower and the known. It fails to recognize that learning occurs when meaning is constructed and that meaning is constructed when emotions are engaged and conceptual relationships and patterns are discerned and connected.

Constructing meaning by developing deep conceptual understanding is the commitment of all teachers. Yet often this understanding eludes our students. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in science. Misconceptions acquired at very early ages remain entrenched and impervious to change and make further scientific understanding almost impossible.

Because of the importance of scientific understanding to our children’s future, the presence of deep scientific misconceptions has been documented by the Annenberg/CPB project as part of a video series designed to illustrate the current state of science understanding in our country.² Entitled *A Private Universe: Misconceptions That Block Learning*, the video documents the unconscious prevalence of scientific misconceptions of even the most basic scientific concepts held by some of our nation’s most highly educated people. It illustrates how these misconceptions distort the learner’s ability to construct accurate conceptions

8 The Power to Transform

of scientific concepts without intentionally designed instructional interventions.

The video begins with all the flurry, excitement, and festivities of commencement day at one of our nation's most prestigious Ivy League universities. Graduates' names are read from the dais, and beaming students receive their diplomas. Then the video's commentator interrupts the celebration "to test how a lifetime of education affects our understanding of science," asking new graduates, alumni, and faculty to explain a basic scientific notion: the causes of the seasons. We watch several of these high achievers stumble confidently but erroneously through an explanation of the seasons and the phases of the moon. One young man, who had given a particularly articulate—yet incorrect—explanation of the seasons, was asked about his college studies in science. He replied that he had studied "physics, planetary motion, relativity, electrical magnetism, and waves."

Following this painful demonstration of "confident error"—the students did not know what they did not know—the commentator concluded: "Regardless of their science education, 21 out of 23 randomly selected students, alumni, and faculty revealed misconceptions when asked to explain either the seasons or the phases of the moon."

What went wrong? How could students considered our best and brightest have excelled at schooling but not at understanding?

The purpose and patterns of our current story of learning and schooling are rooted in scarcity and deficiency—"fixing" and remediating the learner's limitations. This tenacious mind-set leads to prescriptive and uniform processes and structures of schooling and a learning identity of passive acquisition and pragmatic compliance. The antiseptic rationality of our current story diminishes and often destroys the essence of who we are as boundlessly creative, insatiably curious, meaning-seeking, and collaborative learners. It tells us that learning is only about what we can see, count, memorize, and objectively measure; what we can create, invent, imagine, or dream is not important in learning. This narrow view of learning shuts us down and cuts us off. It silences our heart and spirit, marginalizes emotion, and invites only part of who we are into learning. The sad and sobering paradox of our current story of schooling is that to protect themselves from the embarrassment and failure of giving the "wrong"

answer or asking the “wrong” question, our children retreat and hide their deepest self.

“Why should I raise my hand?” a student once asked me after I asked why he didn’t participate in class. “I’ll probably get the wrong answer, and everyone will laugh and think I’m stupid!” Then he got very quiet and looked at me warily. “Do *you* think I’m stupid?” he asked.

Conceived and framed within a context of scarcity, deficiency, and fragmentation, our current patterns, processes, and structures of schooling are not designed to ignite our children’s joy, intellectual energy, and imagination. They are not dynamic or integrative enough to enable our children to analyze and solve complex, messy problems and to engage with passion in exploring their real questions about life. And they are not experiential enough to encourage our children to access and experience the mystery and enchantment of their rich interior lives, understand how they belong to the world and one another, and embrace and celebrate their remarkable capacity to sense an emergent future and evoke its creation. They are quite simply irreconcilable with the principles of life and learning. As a result, many of our children have become schooling disabled in a learning-abundant universe.

Our schools must be transformed. Adding wings to caterpillars does not create butterflies; it creates awkward and dysfunctional caterpillars. Butterflies emerge through transformation. So it is with our system of schooling, and so it is with our schools. It is my belief that there is no place in the future for a school in the traditional sense of the word.

WHY CAN’T JOHNNY *and* SUSIE READ, WRITE, COUNT—*and* THINK?

The attributes of our current story of schooling reflect our societal ambitions and predispositions. This “success” has been at an enormous human cost: reductive thinking that perpetuates an orthodoxy of excessive fragmentation, acquisition, consumption, unhealthy competition, speed, and winning—and then wonders why contentment and a sense of meaning and purpose remain so elusive.

Within this context, it is tragically predictable that the criticism of public education rests almost exclusively on inadequate achievement

10 The Power to Transform

on standardized tests in the basics of literacy and numeracy. “Why can’t Johnny and Susie read, write, and count?” is the mantra of school reform. To be sure, these prerequisite skills are essential for all future learning—and they are not enough. Where are the voices that fear as much for the deeper basics—the basics of the human mind, heart, and spirit? Why aren’t we at least equally troubled by why Johnny and Susie can’t think, can’t slow down, can’t reflect, can’t sit still, can’t imagine, can’t create, and can’t play? Why aren’t we deeply saddened that they can’t dance, or paint, or draw, or make up a story? Why aren’t we worried that they can’t cope with frustration and conflict? That it is so easy for them to be bored, cynical, and distrusting of adults and that it is so difficult for them to express deep love, trust, and compassion? Why are our hearts not heavy because their spirits cannot breathe, because they have not experienced the wonder and awe of the natural world, and because they do not know how and why they belong in the world?

Just as we must teach children to read, write, speak, and compute well, we must also create learning conditions that enable them to think—to discern the intricate complexities within and between problems, collaborate in conflict resolution, conceive new ideas and solutions, and become stewards of life.

OBSESSED *with* SINGULAR *and* SIMPLISTIC MEASUREMENT

Albert Einstein wisely said, “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.” Despite his prescient warning, it should not surprise us that we are placing disproportionate value on that which can be easily and quickly observed, quantified, counted, and used. Students pinning their college and career hopes on impressive transcripts with staggering numbers of activities, high grade-point averages, and near-perfect SAT scores are often challenged to recall what they actually learned during their twelve years of schooling. Teachers, feeling compelled to teach to the test, soon lose their passion and enthusiasm for their discipline and for teaching.

This narrowing context and perspective has been relentless, and its vortex of acquisition and competition is inescapable and disabling. The dominant construct in our current social contract is instrumentalism—that which is practical and immediately useful. Consequently, less well-

developed and perhaps less immediately “useful” ideas almost inevitably yield to the dominant view. Despite their transformative potential, these new ideas often appear insignificant or naive or are readily dismissed as irrational.

But praising and rewarding instrumentalism at the expense of sustainability, and the illusion of learning at the expense of deep understanding, has created a crisis of mind and meaning. If we did nothing else to endanger our children and their future, this would be enough. Our vast repository of measurement tools has led to an obsession with quantification. The tools have not only defined and determined the task, they have shaped the minds that must now learn how to successfully use them. Our tools for achievement have constrained our opportunities for learning. The authentic reality and value of deep learning has become hijacked by the perceived virtual reality and value of high-stakes test scores. A false proxy has become more real than genuine learning. Just as a corporation’s stock price is not an indication of its value, quality, long-term growth potential, or sustainability, the same is true with our children’s high-stakes test scores. Of course, we must continuously assess our students’ learning, but we can no longer be deceived by singular and simplistic measures. Measuring achievement is not the same as assessing deep learning.

The transformative process of creating a radical new story of learning and schooling must be rooted in our deepest learning priorities.

WHAT WE *and* OUR CHILDREN HAVE LOST

The profound systemic problems that now cast a malignant shadow over our global community, our own society, and the growing minds of our children will not be resolved until we reconnect to the roots of what it means to be fully human and to what we and our children seem to have lost:

- A sense of personal identity, meaning and purpose.
- A passion for learning.
- A sense of wholeness, connectedness, and relatedness to the natural world and to one another. A deep awareness that we are part of something bigger, more mysterious, wondrous, and more transcendent than ourselves.

12 The Power to Transform

- An understanding that we must bring all the ways we uniquely come to know into learning—the analytical *and* the intuitive, the objective *and* the experiential, the scientific *and* the aesthetic, the linear *and* the spiritual.
- The compassionate use of knowledge and a global concern for human and community prosperity and moral action in the world.
- A commitment to ecological sustainability and the embrace of nature as a sacred and healing dimension of our lives.
- The capacity for silence and solitude.
- The intimate connection and collaboration of youth and elders around shared purpose.
- The confidence to challenge current reality and create new possibilities.

Perhaps most distressing of all, we seem to have lost the joy of deeply and imaginatively exploring what we love.

Teachers too are feeling loss. Many who enter the profession eager to teach are leaving prematurely, unable to serve a system they perceive as not serving children. This should not surprise us. Teachers are losing heart. The more we require their adherence to teaching scripts and prescribed “teacher-proof” curricula largely designed for high-stakes test performance, the more we thwart their intuition, imagination, and professional commitment to respond creatively to our children’s learning needs. Formulaic instruction, time-consuming test preparation, and a rigid focus on one-size-fits-all processes, strategies, and structures are eroding our teachers’ passion for teaching.

I can, with you, name countless great teachers and schools that have defied the system so they could develop our children’s deep learning and understanding. But without the continuous support of a generative educational system, their efforts are idiosyncratic, often subject to marginalization, and likely unsustainable. They will undoubtedly nurture scores of individual learners, but they will not transform the minds of a generation. We have taken the self, the heart, and the life out of teaching and teachers. It is now our work to create a way home and back to life.

Our children are also losing heart. Regrettably, they view schooling as synonymous with learning, so they do not believe that learning is natural or relevant. Sadly, they appear indifferent, tentative, and almost uncomfortable when asked to engage in *real* learning. I have seen advanced learners put down their pencils and refuse to tackle a math problem they had never seen before or formally been taught because they feared failure and working together was not considered an option. Many of our children have skillfully excelled at schooling—learning what and how much to do to “get an A”—but deep learning is often an alien and fearful endeavor. What’s worse, they believe learning is supposed to be this way because we have told them that competing for and getting top grades will prepare them for the arduous demands of the “real world.” They have no way of knowing that they have unintentionally been shortchanged.

Mentally, emotionally, and spiritually out of breath, many children are hyperventilating from frenzied trivial pursuit and excessive activity. They do not know how to reflect in silence, although they crave it. They do not engage or see value in serious inquiry and problem solving, although they seek deeper understanding. They see little connection between themselves, the natural world, and the larger human story, although they yearn for meaning and purpose. They are detached from adults and community, although they seek greater connections and yearn to belong. They live for the moment and do not consider the long-term consequences of their behavior because their sense of connection to what has gone before and what will follow is tentative. They do not believe they have the capacity to evoke the future because reality is perceived to be fixed and everything is a short-term event. Nothing seems connected. Patterns are unclear; only things and events matter. Most children, especially high school students, know they are stressed, but they do not know where or how to begin the conversation that can change things.

Many educators, policymakers, and parents also know that at the deepest, most fundamental human level, the cultural narrative and patterns of thinking and behaving reflected in our current system of schooling are not healthy and cannot nurture minds able to create a meaning-filled and sustainable future. But they too are losing heart. They do not know where or how to begin the conversation to transform it.

14 The Power to Transform

The price we pay for these sustained losses is far too high. In denying our need to understand and connect to the unifying and coherent songline of life in learning, we sever the deep roots of belonging that connect us to one another, to all of life, and to our own abundant potentials and transformative capacities. We must now confront and resolve the incongruity between what we deeply know, how we live, and how we educate the minds, hearts, and spirit of our children.

As one of the most stable of all social institutions, schools mirror and reinforce our culture's dominant economic and achievement narratives. But they can no longer be reflectors and transmitters of this increasingly impoverished story. The global consequences of impoverished mind making are staggering. Schools must now embody a radical new story of learning embedded in the mystery and creativity of life itself. Together we can create a generative new learning landscape—a new curriculum for life that immerses our children in essential questions and ideas and enables them to more naturally learn their way into creating a sustainable and just future for all.

The NEW STORY IS RADICAL *and* GENERATIVE

To be radical means to go to the core—to the deepest and most sustaining part of life, to the source of our vitality and generativity. Our new story of learning and schooling is radical because it reconnects us to life, meaning, wholeness, and the deepest roots of what it means to be fully human: creative integration of all of our ways of knowing in learning.

It is this creative integration of potentials that makes our new story generative. Generativity is an intentional and creative process of becoming. It enables the endless emergence of wholeness, connections, and novelty. It is the continuous creation and unfolding of life. Parker Palmer, an internationally recognized writer, speaker, and educational activist, describes generativity as “creativity in the service of the young.”³ Implicit in this wise description is the deep connective thread of nurturing, teaching, and mentoring our children.

Our new story of learning and schooling provides a dynamic map for the intentional design of generative learning communities radically different from our current system. Generative learning communities are life and soul affirming. They nourish and sustain the conditions

necessary for life and deep learning to thrive. They create space and time for the passion, wonder, and boundless creativity of our children's intellect, imagination, and inventive genius to flourish. They offer safe and playful practice fields for our children to explore their potentials for bringing forth new worlds and reconnecting to what they have lost.

It is my belief that the fundamental purpose of schooling is to liberate the goodness and genius of children by giving them all the tools they need to become fearless and self-directed learners, to learn how to continuously learn and to reengage and reconnect their thinking in holistic, systemic, and wise ways. When we ignite and nurture the unknowable potentials of each learner, we give them the roots they need for complex disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary understanding; for knowledge generation; for critical and creative thinking; and for ethical action in the world. It is through immersion in multiple ways of knowing, doing, being, and living together that meaning, purpose, connection, and a deep sense of belonging can emerge.⁴ This is the context for the growth of integral and wise minds, discussed in more depth in Chapter Three. Schooling is fundamentally a moral enterprise and it must engage and connect the real lives of our children to the real needs of the world.

Generative learning communities know how to continuously learn. They are teeming with the energy and spirit of life. They stimulate exploration, invite newness, deepen our sense of self and other, and expand our boundless capacity for continuous learning. They enable us to connect to one another, and cocreate the future by bringing forth new relationships and new realities that will create more and more possibilities. Generative learning communities:

- Invite, develop, and nurture each child's multiple learning potentials and natural predispositions for continuous learning—for meaning making, integration, exploration, discovery, invention, creation, and wisdom.
- Reconnect our children to the natural world; their communities; the human family; and the unity, wholeness, interdependence, diversity, novelty, and boundless creativity of life.
- Reengage our children's rich interior lives—emotion, intuition, imagination, love, experience, and spirit—in learning.

16 The Power to Transform

- Nurture the potential of each child to wisely advance the human condition and cocreate our future by developing their capacity to discern meaning from patterns, think systemically, take the long view, and act with moral purpose.

There has never been a more important time to re-perceive and re-design schooling and the context and conditions within which the minds, hearts, and spirits of our children and our future are grown. The human future will be defined by our children's minds and the nature and quality of their presence on the earth. Now is the time to transform the current reductive, prescriptive, and uniform paradigm of schooling. It is the right moment to create a generative, life-affirming, and personalized story of learning and schooling that stimulates the emergence of whole, healthy, vibrant, and wise minds able to more naturally learn their way into creating a sustainable human future. This new story will become our new map.

The NEED for NEW LANGUAGE

Authoring this new story will require new language. "To be human is to exist in language," world-renowned physicist Fritjof Capra reminds us. "In language we coordinate our behavior, and together in language we bring forth our world."⁵

Language serves as a context, structure, and process for thinking and perceiving. It weaves patterns and enables us to create abstractions and symbolic imagery. It is no coincidence that our cultural landscape is shaped by the thought patterns (memes) inherent in a language permeated by parts and not wholes, and by the domination of things (nouns), not relationships (verbs and processes).

The language that shapes our culture and current system of learning and schooling is rooted in a militaristic, hierarchical, competitive, and command-and-control framework. Sprinkled throughout our organizational conversations, we frequently hear references to stepping up to the plate, making an end run, raising the bar, following the chain of command, making a game plan, and our many, many references to war—war against poverty, against drugs, against terrorism, against illiteracy.

This analytical and competitive language and the mental model it creates enable us to precisely describe, measure, sort, and control the behavior of seemingly independent parts. But it betrays the existence of the wholeness, flowing interdependence, and networked patterns and relationships of life and learning. It is inadequate for reshaping the public conversation needed to create a generative and life-affirming story of learning and schooling and bring it to life.

It should not surprise us that from the imaginative void inherent in our algorithmic language emerge impoverished stories that cannot liberate our innate sense of wonder, awe, mystery, and surprise. We must pay careful attention to the discourse now emerging in our schools and to the limitations created by using militaristic and market-driven concepts, language and metrics, to define and assess human potential and learning. The pervasiveness of our current commercial, competitive, and quantitative discourse creates mental models that diminish the vibrancy and dynamism of the human mind, heart, and spirit in learning.

When our language is prescriptive, our schools cannot be generative. When our language is controlling, our schools cannot be creative. When our language is derived only from the objectively and experimentally verifiable, our schools cannot honor the wisdom and passion that come from the inner life of children and their intuitive and subjective experience.

Because our worldview is constrained or freed by the limitations or possibilities inherent in language, we need a profoundly different language to create a radical new story of learning and schooling. It will come from the language of nature, and its vitality and creative energy will reignite our imagination.

Only a living language can create living patterns, and only living patterns can create living environments. We have clearly excelled in the language of reductive schooling. It is now time to become fluent in the language of generative learning. By paying attention to the patterns of the natural world, we can move from a reductionist language to a holistic language, from machine-based images to ecology-based images, and from rigid structures to mutable learning environments. Because the limitations of our current language restrict the kind of world we are able to imagine and shape, it is imperative that we learn

18 The Power to Transform

the language of life and learning and use it to design educational landscapes that are vibrant and alive. A school cannot come alive and cannot become a sustainable learning community without a living language that enables the design of processes and structures that embody the generative patterns of life in learning.

This living language is a language of creation, wonder, and enchantment—of mystery and meaning. It is a language of wholeness and unity. Nature's lexicon, as we will see in the next chapter, is a language of integration, connections, reciprocity, and interdependence. Life explores, imagines, adapts, and improvises; its language speaks of networks, patterns, inherent (not imposed) order, and discovery. It is a language of freedom, vitality, diversity, unpredictability, novelty, and creativity. It is a language of wholes, not parts; of relationships, not things; of meaning, not mandates; of disturbances, not directives; and of abundance, not scarcity. The language of life is a language that engages the spirit.

The creation of generative learning communities and the emergence of integral and wise minds are inextricably connected to the language, underlying patterns, and design principles of life and learning. It is this frontier that we now explore.