From: THE WAY FORWARD, by C. A. Bowers, 2012, The Eco-Justice Press

Chapter 3 The Political Economy of the Cultural Commons and the Nature of Sustainable Wealth

People of all ages are awakening to a reality that has been hidden by years of seemingly limitless consumerism and the expectation of lifetime employment. This has been an evolving reality marked by increased automation, caution-to-the-wind expansion of manufacturing capacity, outsourcing of jobs to low-wage regions of the world, the breakdown in the social contract between employers and employees, and the increasing sense of entitlement that gives the heads of corporations the right to millions of dollars in compensation regardless of their performance. The consequences of these largely ignored realities are now affecting the lives of both students and adults. Unemployment and working for a minimum wage (if that is even available), the threat of losing one's home to foreclosure, the inability to pay for health care, growing food insecurity, and the reduced hopes for further education are the realities now experienced by millions of people. To rework Charles Dickens' famous phrase, the best of times are now turning into the worst of times.

The spread of poverty continues with little hope in sight, especially now that fear is replacing the myth of unending progress in accumulating more material wealth. The fear, and the sense of helplessness that accompanies it, are based on years of being socialized by the media and other consciousness-shaping forces to equate wealth with gains in the money economy. In short, the amount of money one acquires has become the primary measure of wealth. This narrow understanding of wealth has led to a competitive form of politics in which the achievement of success requires placing one's own economic interests over the well-being of others. Individuals, families, and ethnic groups gained in wealth as they took advantage of the marginalized and thus politically powerless, just as the wealth of corporations depended upon paying workers as little as possible. Indeed, the more economically vulnerable the workers, the more easily they can be underpaid and their past gains in the workplace revoked. The role of government, as many market liberals understand it today, is not to impose limitations on industrial capitalism, while being ever-ready to pass legislation that furthers the interests of

corporate lobbyists who provide the money necessary for winning elections. In short, the form of politics essential to an industrial/market/consumer economy operates behind the façade of being democratic, but it continues to be based on the competitive pursuit of self-interest in which money determines, with few exceptions, who will be the winners and losers in achieving even greater material wealth.

This form of politics and the pursuit of profits will also ensure that the fate of natural systems will continue to be an "exploitable resource." It must be acknowledged, however, that there is an increased awareness that environments are being degraded in ways that will further diminish the material wealth of this and future generations. This awareness is now creating greater tensions between political factions. Unfortunately, nearly half of the voting public still thinks of the free-market ideology, and its underlying assumptions, as having the same status as the law of gravity. For the majority of these followers of Adam Smith (who badly misinterpreted his ideas), Milton Friedman, and today's libertarians, environmental changes are part of the natural cycles that have occurred over millions of years and cannot be attributed to the excesses of human behavior.

The failure of public schools and universities to challenge the dominant cultural assumptions that underlie the political and economic system that equates wealth with the possession of money, and the credential system that provides access to power and money, have left most people ignorant of how to avoid sinking further into poverty and hopelessness. Part of the failure of these institutions, which is reproduced by their graduates who use the media to promote the same misconceptions and silences acquired as part of their university education, is in not introducing students to a more complex and community-grounded understanding of the sustainable forms of wealth that represent alternatives to what is dependent upon the money economy. This failure is partly linguistic, partly rooted in the high-status accorded to abstract knowledge and patterns of thinking, and partly rooted in a combination of cultural developments connected with the rise of science and what has become the mythic foundations of modernity. These mythic foundations include the idea of the autonomous individual, the progressive nature of change, the culture-free nature of the rational process and critical inquiry, an anthropocentric view of human/nature relationships, and the Darwinian view that the

competitive nature of free markets will determine which genes and cultural memes are best fit to survive. It is important, however, to recognize that not all members of local communities or ethnic groups in North America have based their lives on these assumptions. Indeed, many have discovered the non-monetized forms of wealth that have largely been ignored in the curricula of public schools and universities.

These non-monetized forms of wealth have not only been important to sustaining the lives of people locked out of the money economy, but they are also taken for granted by people who live well above the poverty line. Because these non-monetized forms of wealth have been accorded low status and thus omitted from the curricula of most public schools and universities, graduates are caught in a double bind of which they are not aware. They lack an explicit awareness of the non-monetized community and intergenerational forms of wealth they rely upon in most daily activities, while at the same time they look forward to a return to the days of unbridled consumerism and life-time employment. The reality they will encounter in the future will be quite different. Automation, outsourcing, and downsizing are here to stay. In addition, the primary need of the industrial system of production and consumption to expand will lead to turning more of the non-monetized relationships and activities into new market opportunities, thus further increasing people's dependence upon the money economy. Because of the historical roots of this system of production, and the cultural assumptions upon which it is based, it has not occurred to most people that the individualistic, competitive, consumer-dependent lifestyle, and its accompanying form of politics, are not ecologically sustainable—even over the short run. This double bind is more than a short-lived down turn in the economy. It now characterizes the embodied experiences of millions of people who seek a return to the halcyon days but are unable to recognize that those days will not return. Even more important is that they are unable to recognize the alternative forms of wealth that are part of the cultural commons of every community.

The task here is to clarify the forms of wealth intrinsic to the cultural commons, including how they differ from the wealth acquired by participating in the money economy. Money is useful in many ways, and it will continue to have a role to play in facilitating exchanges in the larger world. Its role, however, will be reduced by environmental as well as by global technological and cultural changes. These changes

may range from Third World cultures resisting the western model of development to the collapse of the modern state that we are now witnessing in some regions of the world. Thus, it is now imperative that people obtain an explicit understanding of the unique characteristics of the wealth that is available in the local cultural commons. The wealth of the cultural commons takes many forms and has the following unique characteristics. It enables people to discover interests and talents that lead to less stressful and thus less debilitating lives, to lifestyles that have a smaller adverse impact on the ability of natural systems to renew themselves, to alternative ways of reducing dependence upon processed foods that are costly and often unhealthy, and to maintaining the local traditions of participatory decision making that safeguard against the further integration into the market economy of what remains of the local cultural and environmental commons.

A second task is to clarify the form of politics that supports the alternative economies of the cultural commons that vary from culture to culture. This task may seem rather straightforward, but it needs to be recognized that hundreds of years of mis-education are responsible for the difficulty many people have in being explicitly aware of the nature of their local cultural commons—even as they tacitly rely upon them as part of their everyday lives. There are also the problems of misinterpretation in which readers will reach conclusions that reflect their own unexamined taken for granted assumptions and, in some cases, romanticize the idea of the cultural commons rather than recognize examples of the cultural commons that do not fit current norms of social and ecological justice. There is also the challenge of introducing new ways of understanding the meaning of words, as well as recognizing that words such as "wealth" and "commons" have different meanings in different cultures and in different historical periods in the West. Hopefully, these sources of resistance will not hamper efforts to consider the educational reform implications of introducing students to the political economy of the cultural commons, or the policy issues required to achieve a better balance between participating in the money economy and the lifestyles that are more engaged in renewing the cultural, and by extension, the environmental commons.

In order to understand how the cultural commons represent alternative forms of wealth, it is necessary to go beyond abstract descriptions. Abstract descriptions found in printed texts too often are reduced to identifying what turns out to be general categories

of intergenerational knowledge, skills, and mutually supportive relationships—such as the growing, preparing, and sharing of food, knowledge of the medicinal characteristics of plants and traditionally proven remedies, narratives and ceremonies, forms of artistic expression and craft knowledge, rules and practices that govern moral relationships and forms of reciprocity, knowledge of how to adapt cultural practices to the life cycles that sustain local ecosystems, and so forth. Each of these categories needs to be understood in terms of culturally diverse local practices and, more importantly, the depth of background knowledge that the activities in each of these categories depend upon.

In order to grasp a partial understanding of how different aspects of the local cultural commons are dependent upon the accumulated intergenerational knowledge and skills, it is necessary to do an auto-ethnographic account of how different aspects of the cultural commons are the basis of daily experience. Examples might include a description of how using recipes passed down within the family or through widely shared cultural practices are dependent upon knowledge gained and refined in the past. The auto-ethnography might focus on the background knowledge and intergenerational traditions that now lead to the taken for granted expectation that one's home will not be searched by government agents without a search warrant. Reliance upon proven techniques in framing the walls of a house, playing a piano, and following the rules of a game are also examples of intergenerational wealth that is the source of individual and group empowerment.

Admittedly, it is difficult to do an auto-ethnography of the layers of accumulated knowledge and skills that are relied upon when participating in the cultural commons that we casually refer to as everyday life experiences. We are too often absorbed in completing the task at hand, and moving on to another task, to consider the knowledge and skills accumulated over many generations that we tacitly rely upon. The fast pace required by the increasing dependence upon technology and the need to participate in the cycle of work, consuming, and meeting debt payments, contributes to a permanent state of cultural amnesia. Perhaps the even more overriding reason for the current state of ignorance of the wealth of the cultural commons is that it is largely taken for granted. Thus, what is taken for granted is often the tacit knowledge of skills, values, and activities that are relied upon in different physical and cultural contexts.

Unfortunately, when explicit awareness of the different forms of intergenerational knowledge and skills is lacking, outside economic and political forces may undermine or appropriate different aspects of the cultural commons without people knowing what has been lost. For example, important parts of our vocabulary have been lost to the forces of science and technology, just as non-western cultures have lost traditions of intergenerational knowledge as their youth have been socialized to adopt the western assumptions essential to making them dependent upon an industrial/consumer-dependent lifestyle. Socializing the poor to the values and vocabulary that support dependence upon processed food, as well as the loss of intergenerational knowledge, has further undermined their health when they could more easily have afforded the basic ingredients that previous generations relied upon for a healthy diet. Examples of how not being aware of the wealth of intergenerational knowledge that represents alternatives to dependence upon the industrial/consumer-dependent lifestyle contributes to poverty and helplessness can be multiplied many times over.

Key characteristics of the wealth of the cultural commons

A primary characteristic among the diversity of the world's cultural commons is that the wealth of the cultural commons cannot be put in the bank, invested in the stock market, or limited to a privileged few. Rather, it exists as the source of empowerment in daily practices, ways of thinking, patterns of moral reciprocity, as a source of self-confidence, as knowledge of what practices and policies have proven dangerous to life and community, as the accumulated knowledge and technical skill that lies behind every major advance in knowledge, social justice, and technology. Potentially, it is the most democratic form of wealth, as it is shared through conversations, mentoring, and observing others, as well as through narratives and the arts. Learning to think and communicate in the languaging processes of the community is the first step in acquiring the accumulated wealth of the cultural commons. As participating in the cultural commons involves actions, performances, and relationships, it makes more sense to think of the language describing the cultural commons as verbs rather than as nouns that represent it as an abstraction and an object of analysis. Another characteristic of the accumulated knowledge, skills, and moral wisdom that is integral to many cultural

commons is that as a form of wealth it cannot be lost through inflation or affected by the cycles of a money economy.

Indeed, as reliance on the money economy is threatened by the various excesses of greed, consumer debt, over production, and collapsing markets, people become more aware of the need to rely on the wealth of cultural commons. The recent collapse of the economic system in Iceland is a prime example. As the source of money and employment dried up as a result of the failures occurring in the national and international banking systems, the people turned to sources of wealth that were part of their cultural heritage. That is, they turned to the wealth of their cultural commons. Instead of importing goods and services, the people of Reykjavik turned to the knowledge and skills passed down by their grandparents, who were themselves inheritors of the accumulated wealth of earlier generations. Instead of the descent into poverty, the people began to rely upon the wealth of knowledge that enabled them to create from wood, metal, and fabrics items that could be exchanged and sold locally.

The current breakdown in the market economy has led to a similar recognition of the importance of the knowledge and skills of the local cultural commons. This includes the increase in the number of individual and community gardens, the revival of interest in various crafts, and the increase in volunteerism that in some communities has risen to over 36 percent of the local population and is focused on human needs ranging from food, repairing dwellings, and restoration of local ecosystems to community performances. Local markets, as well as a revival of bartering and the use of local currencies, are also part of the turn toward greater reliance upon the wealth of the local cultural and environmental commons.

This revitalization of the cultural commons is only a minor trend occurring across the nation and does not yet represent a major shift in consciousness. The majority of Americans, even in being unemployed and facing foreclosure, are still hoping for a return to the days of a consumer-dependent lifestyle and to taking their chances on achieving success in a money-dominated economy. This expectation is being reinforced by politicians who are continuing to promise a return to the lifestyle required by the industrial system of production and consumption, even as they also warn that the deepening ecological crisis will require new advances in technology.

To obtain a fuller understanding of how people are dependent upon the wealth of the local cultural commons, even during years of a growing economy, it is necessary to consider what represents inherited knowledge and skill and what is original to the individual. Does the craftsperson who is making a cabinet, or a violin, or framing the opening for a window, rely entirely on what she/he originates? Is knowledge acquired through trial and error of how to make the corners of a drawer that are both aesthetically pleasing and strong, or is it more often learned through a mentoring relationship, by following the advice of a neighbor or family member—or even following a manual? Did the Jonas Salks and Albert Einsteins of the world rely upon the accumulated wealth of the cultural commons of which they were members in order to make their discoveries? In short, are there examples of cutting-edge technologies or systems of thinking that do not depend upon a shared heritage? On a less lofty level, the craftsperson making a musical instrument is empowered when she/he can draw upon the knowledge accumulated by earlier generations about the sounds that will resonate from the use of different woods. Similarly, learning the rules of a chess game, the soil conditions and length of growing seasons for different plants, the way to prepare a curry and to preserve food, the patterns of meta-communication, and the established procedures to follow when one's civil rights have been violated are everyday examples of the widespread reliance on the shared wealth of the cultural commons. Sharing is essential to intergenerational renewal and is another characteristic that separates the wealth of the cultural commons from what is privately owned.

While vast amounts of information (much of it abstract and thus taken out of context) is increasingly available on the Internet, it is nevertheless different from the knowledge and skills passed on through face-to-face communication. When the wealth of the commons is encoded digitally it does not take account of cultural contexts, tacit understandings, and the powerful learning experience shaped by patterns of meta-communication that are part of mentoring relationships. Turning the wealth of the cultural commons into abstract descriptions has certain advantages, but it is also the first step to turning it into a monetized commodity. It is also an important step toward the enclosure of the cultural commons.

Before turning to a closer examination of the various forms of enclosure that students need to understand if they are to participate politically as adults in making decisions about what aspects of the local cultural commons need to be intergenerationally renewed, and which need to be modified or abandoned entirely, it is necessary to recognize that many cultural commons carry on traditions that are sources of exploitation and oppression. That is, the heritage or what is being referred to here as intergenerational knowledge may be a mix of wisdom of how to meet certain basic needs as well as prejudices that perpetuate various forms of discrimination and unjust social practices. For example, there are regions in the United States that have highly developed community-centered musical traditions (an important form of wealth), while at the same time they carry on traditions of racial and gender discrimination. These forms of discrimination lead, in turn, to reduced opportunities to participate in the money economy at a level necessary for meeting basic food, shelter, medical, and educational needs.

Summary of the differences between the political economy of the cultural commons and the market/industrial system of production and consumption

Focusing on the politics that separate the two economies brings out fundamental differences. A key difference is that the politics of many cultural commons are democratic in a way that empowers the community's traditions of mutual support and self-sufficiency. As skills and knowledge are shared in face-to-face relationships, and through other forms of intergenerational communication, questions and insights are shared. In effect, the interpersonal politics involve the element of mutuality and respect for others, which is at the core of Martin Buber's description of dialogue. It is the form of the politics found in mentoring relationships—though, to be realistic, mentoring is not always free of petty and even intergenerational misunderstandings. The politics of the cultural commons can also be seen in the distinction that Guillermo Bonfil Batalla makes between a culture where the norm is returning work as opposed to paying for work. (1996) The former is the politics of mutual support, while the latter is too often the politics of self-interest. There may be social hierarchies and systems of exclusions that influence who shares in the wealth of the cultural and environmental commons. These are sources of injustice and social pathologies that need to be overcome. In the healthy

and life-enhancing aspects of the local cultural commons, wealth is found in sustaining the diversity of talents and skills, and in maintaining the intergenerational connections.

The politics of the industrial/market economy are profoundly different. In these economies, there is an emphasis on private ownership, and on accumulating more wealth—which is often achieved by reducing the opportunities and wages of others. In addition, the dominant ethos is to reduce the role of workers in making decisions about the process of work and the overall goals of the business. Competition rather than cooperation governs most relationships. Exploiting the human vulnerabilities of wanting to consume what is stylish and conveys a higher status in the community also figures into the politics of the industrial/market economy. At the governmental level, lobbyists pour vast sums of money into acquiring special advantages—which often take the form of obtaining tax breaks and huge government subsidies.

There is an even more destructive side to the politics practiced within the industrial/market sub-culture. This is the politics of enclosing as many aspects of the cultural commons as possible. This can be seen in how intergenerational approaches to meeting everyday needs ranging from food, healing, creative arts, craft knowledge, ceremonies, civil liberties, and so forth, are being turned into commodities and services that require participating in the money economy. The politics of enclosure may occur behind the façade of democratic decision making when the members of the local community have been indoctrinated to equate social progress with expanding the money economy and market. An educational system that represents the face-to-face, non-monetized intergenerational knowledge and skills as low-status and leaves them out of the curriculum, while representing the forms of knowledge required by the industrial/market-oriented culture as high-status, undermines the possibility of genuine democracy. For example, the silences perpetuated by public schools and universities about the wealth of knowledge that is part of our tradition of civil liberties easily leads to the kind of politics leading to fascism. Both youth and adults will be more welcoming of the latest technologies when the silences and accompanying prejudices falsely represent traditions as obstructing progress. As people become addicted to relying upon these technologies for communicating with others on a non-face-to-face basis, their lives become more hurried and stressful. This, in turn, leads to greater dependence upon the

pharmaceutical industry to substitute their drugs and definitions of illness for the wealth of knowledge accumulated as part of the cultural commons of many cultures. As Vandana Shiva points out, many of the drugs that lead to vast profits are pirated from the intergenerational knowledge of indigenous cultures. (1996)

The following qualifications need to be kept in mind before addressing the educational reforms that enable students to share in the non-monetized wealth of their local cultural commons. We are now witnessing the monetized wealth that individuals and corporations invested in retirement accounts, bonds, stocks, and bank accounts losing value and largely disappearing. The intergenerational forms of wealth of the cultural commons may also be lost, especially when the prevailing ways of thinking are focused on the latest innovations and forms of entertainment. Examples that come readily to mind include how reliance upon industrially prepared food leads to a loss of knowledge of how to use traditional recipes to prepare a meal and to grow vegetables. As youth spend more time playing video games and participating in electronically driven social networks, there is less likelihood they will know the stories of their ancestors' achievements and wrongs done to others. Listening to market- liberal talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh and the Fox News commentators will further undermine awareness of the accumulated political wisdom encoded in the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the gains in civil rights and social justice. The continual effort to expand markets in the name of progress also contributes to the further attrition of the cultural commons. The current lack of moral limits on what aspects of the cultural commons can be transformed into a commodity or service means that they are all under constant threat.

We should not think of the wealth of the cultural commons as entirely replacing the need for meaningful employment and a wage that enables people to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, health care, and education. Money is still required to purchase the goods and services that represent the genuine achievements of the scientific/industrial culture. However, the need for community, self-expression, and growth in developing an ecological form of intelligence can be met more fully by involvement in the local cultural commons. It's not an either/or issue, but one of balance that takes account of the excesses and exploitive nature of the industrial/consumer-oriented culture, as well as the need to live in ways that have a smaller adverse impact on the Earth's ecosystems.

What students should learn about the differences between the political economy of the cultural commons and of the free-market system of production and consumption.

The basic concepts that teachers and professors need to introduce include the following:

- The fundamental insight that should frame the discussion of educational reforms is Herman E. Daly's (1991) observation that while the environment establishes absolute limits on how far the industrial economy can expand, there are no environmental limits on the development of a culture's symbolic systems (or what is being referred to here as the life-and community-enhancing cultural commons).
- An auto-ethnography needs to be undertaken, as most aspects of the local cultural commons are experienced at a taken for granted level of awareness. This will involve a careful mapping of the intergenerational knowledge and skills that exist within the community, as well as the mentors who keep the traditions alive. This will ensure that the discussion is grounded in the culturally influenced embodied experiences of the students—and not treated as an abstract textbook explanation with which few students will be able to relate.
- A survey of the number of people who are living lives of voluntary simplicity, as well as those who are unemployed, under employed, and retired, needs to be undertaken, along with a survey of the knowledge that people have about the alternatives to meeting daily needs through consumerism.
- Initiate a discussion of how the wealth of the cultural commons differs from wealth in a money economy. This discussion should also include issues related to which forms of wealth are a human right and which have to be earned in settings where equality of opportunity may be lacking.
- The impacts that these two forms of wealth have on the natural environment should be considered, as well as how they differ in terms of their impact on the cultural commons of other cultures.
- How these two different forms of wealth influence the democratic process should also be discussed.

- As students acquire a more embodied understanding of the differences between the cultural commons and the industrial/consumer-oriented subculture, they need to consider how transforming of the cultural commons into commodities and monetized services affects the environmental commons.
- How to understand the connections between the intergenerational renewal of the cultural commons in ways that reduce the adverse impact on the environmental commons and the nature of ecological intelligence is important in itself. It also establishes the basis for considering a number of misconceptions that are a threat to the local cultural commons and to the prospects of an ecologically sustainable future.
- Following a discussion of the nature of ecological intelligence, and how it will be expressed differently from culture to culture, there needs to be a discussion of the origins of the misconceptions that are reproduced in the meanings that most people associate with such words as "tradition," "individualism," "property," "progress," "environment," "freedom," "technology," "science," and so forth. The key question is: How have these misconceptions limited the development of ecological intelligence? The question of how different technologies, and the ideology that justifies their use, undermines the local cultural commons, as well as the diversity of the world's cultural commons, also needs to be considered. This should lead to examining how different technologies amplify certain ways of thinking, values, and relationships while reducing others. That is, can the mediating characteristics of different technologies become part of the process of cultural colonization?
- Consideration should be given to how the transformation of scientific discoveries into meta-narratives that explain the development of cultures, such as the theory of evolution which is now being extended to explain cultural memes, as well as the argument made by some scientists that they possess the only valid approach to knowledge, contribute to undermining the diversity of cultural commons—and, by extension, the environmental commons of the world. There also needs to be a discussion of the background knowledge students need to possess in order to challenge the injustices that are part of some cultural commons. This would

include a discussion of the background knowledge necessary for resisting various political and economic forces that are transforming the cultural and environmental commons into the private property of individuals and corporations.

- Invite students to consider whether the spread of ecological intelligence among the general population will be necessary if they are to have a sustainable future. Also have them consider whether ecological intelligence will lead to a radical change in how private property is understood. The changes that represent a shift away from the traditional idea of private ownership of property, ideas, and innovations also need to be discussed.

Two suggestions for integrating what is learned in schools with the intergenerational knowledge of the cultural commons

Public schools and universities need to provide leadership in connecting students to the wealth of the cultural commons. This is especially important today, as real wealth is not attained by depleting the wealth of the environmental commons—the hydrocarbons, oceans and streams, soil, forests, and minerals—in order to meet the public's consumer addiction. The first suggestion for exercising leadership is to establish a connection between the local high school and what can be called the community sustainability council. The council would consist of members of the community who possess knowledge of daily living practices that reduce dependence upon the money economy as well as have a smaller ecological footprint. The intergenerational knowledge and skills to be shared with the students through a combination of a class format and field experience would range from how to conserve water, plant eatable yards, reduce the use of electrical power, avoid the use of toxins, preserve (canning, in the old vernacular) fruits and vegetables, to preparing meals from local sources. As the knowledge and skills would be shared by members of the local community, it would reflect an understanding of the unique characteristics of the bioregion. For example, knowledge about how to increase the number of pollinators and diversity of birds, as well as the types of vegetables that thrive in different seasons and in different soils, would have practical benefits. On their own, students are not likely to learn the knowledge and skills accumulated by the long-term inhabitants of the region. And as the money economy continues to slide, along with how automation reduces the need for workers, the students will begin to recognize that greater dependence upon the knowledge and practices that sustain the local cultural commons is a way of escaping the debilitating impact of economically driven poverty.

A second proposal for how the local high school can take a leadership role in revitalizing the local cultural commons would be for students in the social studies class to maintain a website that enables members of the community to network with each other in meeting the following needs:

- Enable the unemployed and under-employed to contact various mentors in the community who are engaged in cultural commons activities—ranging from food security, creative arts, craft knowledge and skill, to volunteering, and developing social organizational skills. The first step would be for high school students to conduct a survey of the mentors in the community, as well as the different activities that are part of the local cultural commons. When the unemployed and under-employed are able to network with others in the community, they will be more likely to discover interests, talents, and the benefits of community participation that they did not have time for when they were caught in the cycle of working in order to consume, and to prevent a further slide into debt.
- Enabling members of different social groups to share their knowledge of how to prepare nutritious meals from locally available basic ingredients that can be obtained at a fraction of the cost of the processed foods handed out by food banks. This will empower people with the knowledge and skills necessary for meeting their nutritional needs with basic ingredients that ethnic groups have relied upon in the past. It will also provide a community alternative to the current practice of distributing packaged foods to the unemployed that contain many unhealthy chemicals.
- Enable farmers to communicate with others in the community about when their fields and orchards are open for gathering free vegetables and fruits. A computer network that connects local farmers with a community clearinghouse for those in need would be especially important, as well as ensuring that a manageable number of people visit these farms.
- Enable people who have already made the transition to voluntary simplicity, or have less need for an income connected with full time employment, to communicate their willingness to engage in job sharing. The network would enable people seeking part-time work to communicate with people willing to

make the transition to part-time employment. There will be a number of issues, depending upon the nature of employment that will need to be worked out and agreed upon. The dominant issue, however, is to strengthen the sense of community by helping reduce the level of unemployment and hopelessness that will continue to be a problem as automation, downsizing, outsourcing, and economic systems continue to undergo change.

- Enable members of the community to barter with others who possess skills and can provide services, thus restoring the traditional understanding of the market as an exchange of goods and services that enhance the self-sufficiency of the local community.
- Enable individuals and groups needing some form of assistance to communicate with members of the community who are willing to volunteer their time and energy.

As is often observed, new opportunities emerge during life-altering crises. We are now facing the consequences of excessive consumption, the production of goods that far exceeds the needs of sensible people, and financial speculation driven by pure greed. The major disruptions caused by these excesses are occurring at a time when further automation is likely to leave many more people below the poverty line—or perilously close to it. We are also on the cusp of environmental changes that will create even greater challenges, as the scale of environmental change will lead to vast numbers of people here and abroad becoming environmental refugees, as the ecosystems they previously relied upon for their livelihood become too degraded to support even a subsistence lifestyle.

There are increasing references in both scientific journals and the media to the need to introduce changes that will slow the rate of environmental degradation. Unfortunately, most people still give only lip service to making changes, and the changes they do make are largely limited to recycling their trash into the proper disposal bins. Progress is being made in introducing new energy-efficient technologies and retrofitting buildings. Expressing concern about the environment, which for many is little more than giving expression to what is politically correct, is nevertheless a sign of an opening to learning about the important challenges that lie ahead. Too often, the inability to act on current

understandings about changes in the Earth's natural systems is a result of an educational system that indoctrinated people with the ideas and values that are now failing us. The local cultural commons do not have to be created by government, nor is their existence dependent upon implementing the abstract theories of academics. They can be traced back to the earliest human societies, and they continue to exist even in the most oppressive circumstances.

Religious groups are now struggling to correct a myth of creation that represented, in one powerful account, that "man" was put here to name and subdue the natural world. Even real-estate professionals must now pass a test on the sustainable characteristics of the houses they are trying to sell. Ironically, their awareness that houses must now meet environmental codes is way ahead of the thinking of most public school teachers and university professors. Aside from the small number of environmental educators, and a minority of faculty in colleges and universities who are pushing the boundaries of their areas of inquiry in ways that address environmental issues, the vast majority of faculty who have the potential for influencing young minds, especially professors in colleges of education, seem unable to recognize that the modernizing paradigm they learned from their professors does not lead to understanding the solution. The emphasis on individualism and progress, along with the measurement and control technologies that still dominate the field of teacher education, continue to perpetuate the silences and prejudicial language that make the non-monetized and intergenerational-connected activities and relationships within communities appear as sites of backwardness.

The previous discussion of the political economy of the cultural commons is intended to address some of the silences that still contribute to teacher educators thinking that the ecological crisis is being met by scientists, technologists, and environmental educators who are, in many instances, limited in their understanding of the cultural roots of the ecological crisis. While learning how to foster the ecological intelligence of students will be a major challenge, especially since the practice of ecological intelligence requires abandoning many Enlightenment assumptions, encouraging students to learn from the people who are sustaining the wealth of the local cultural commons should be much easier—particularly when it involves face-to-face relationships and mentoring in

activities that fosters the students' self-discovery of community-centered interests and talents.

Nothing new needs to be invented and promoted. Rather, the role of public schools and universities in revitalizing the local cultural commons requires putting aside certain misconceptions inherited from earlier thinkers who were addressing an entirely different set of problems, and giving attention to the local practices that have not been monetized--and that have a smaller adverse impact on the environment. Auto-ethnographies, the importance of face-to-face intergenerationally connected communication, and a greater sensitivity to the kinds of experiences that enable students to discover talents, as well as who they are as members of a community, is the way forward. And if teacher educators, and professors in the other areas of educational studies, can make this turn, perhaps they will then help students obtain a different understanding of wealth—one that takes account of what is shared with others and is personally fulfilling in ways that differ from owning what has been industrially produced for a mass market. Whether faculty in the social sciences and humanities begin to address the cultural roots of the economic and ecological crises, and the ways they have been complicit in the globalization of the industrial/consumer-oriented culture, is still problematic.