

Arresting the Collapse of the City Through Systemic Education: A Case Study of Melbourne¹

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Abstract

Though it is claimed that Melbourne is one of the most liveable cities in the world, a systemic examination, based not on mechanistic and utilitarian foundations but on a humanist, systemic science reveals that a variety of modalities of its social fabric are threatened and will drive the city to eventual collapse. As usual, the worst impacted are the most defenceless: the poor, the elderly and especially the young. We propose that an education that emphasises vision and ethics and that integrates the humanities with the natural sciences in a systemic approach should be the prime instrument of intervention. We describe a new Master of Arts degree designed on these principles to reorientate young professionals towards the community and away from big business and commerce.

Keywords: community development, social systems analysis, education, multi-modal systems

1 Introduction

Despite being regarded as the father of education and psychology² and being the author who was most read in the sixteenth century after Erasmus³, the Spanish humanist Vives is, with some exceptions, relatively unknown today. Perhaps this is because he was forced to live most of his life outside Spain to avoid being persecuted by the Inquisition and was thus never able to implement his ideas about education in Spanish universities. Although he certainly deserved it, he was impeded from becoming the "teacher of Spain" like his contemporary, Phillip Melancthon who became the "teacher of Germany". Nevertheless his ideals influenced the development of the universities transformed by the Renaissance and Reformation, such as Leyden, Gronigen, Heidelberg and Uppsala. These universities were built on principles of education that pitted them against their medieval counterparts and which he succinctly put forth as follows:

¹ We wish to express our appreciation to Dr. T. H. Goh, Dr. Quilin Goh and Dr. Tim Goh for their generous support with finance, office facilities and other resources necessary to carry out this research and develop the educational programme.

² Moreno and Calero (2006)

³ Marín Ibáñez (1994)

"We [scholars] must transfer our solicitude to the people. This also did Christ, with Whom a Prince is not valued more highly than anyone of the people...Certainly there can be nothing more pleasant to Him, than that we offer our erudition and whatsoever of His gifts we possess to the use of our fellow men, i.e. of His children, for whom God has imparted those great goods that to whomsoever they allotted, they should be of use to the community at large."⁴

Here are three worthy precepts set before us. Firstly, education was for all people and not just the elite. Secondly, one was not meant to seek knowledge for knowledge sake, but for the "common good". Thirdly, education was no individualist pursuit, but aimed at service to the "community at large". This educational orientation brought great scientific, cultural and social advances among the communities that embraced it. It provided, for example, the thrust that transformed fifteenth century Holland from a "...a wretched little country of boatmen and peasants... [that] had no university"⁵ into "...a society, and culture, which regularly fascinated contemporary diplomats, scholars, merchants, churchmen, soldiers, tourists, sailors and connoisseurs of art from many lands..."⁶ in the seventeenth century and which boasted five of the best universities in Europe.

It has been our concern for many years, to reintroduce this ideal and systemically -- according to the methodology described below -- link science, education and community together into university education for young people who live in an increasingly chaotic world. Our present work with a community in Melbourne comprised mostly of university students and recent graduates has provided a further opportunity to continue our endeavour. Most of these youths have come from countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and mainland China to study in Melbourne, some of them with plans to return to their country, others intending to settle permanently in Australia. Most of them come from traditional homes and communities and Melbourne is their first experience of Western affluence and alluring "do-as-you-please" life style, which at first inspires delight and excitement in them. As one young man from Kuala Lumpur put it, "there is so much freedom here that we do not know what to do with it". Yet, soon the true nature of this "freedom" is revealed to them. While the watchful eye of parents, grandparents and aunts are no longer close enough to restrain youthful escapades, it is also too far away to provide the love, guidance and support to which they have been accustomed. Before long, many of them will experience a marginalisation similar to the one sustained by the throng of about 10,000 youth (by conservative estimates) aged between twelve and twenty-four years, who live in the central business district of Melbourne. Ninety percent of them are homeless and ninety percent are engaged in substance abuse (information obtained during an interview with CEO of the Melbourne City Mission).

There are dedicated people who endeavour to meet the needs of these young people and they could indeed do with more support. However, even if all needs are met, we must arrest the inflow of new youth into this homeless and drug abuse pool to eradicate the problem. This means that we should not only be responsible for the present but also for the future. To arrest the flow, these young people require several things. They require a vision that shows them the full potential of life and an educational system to enable them to pursue it. They require a community to which they can belong and where they can experience a familial relationship with its members. They need a natural environment that is viable and safe and where natural and cultural life unfold harmoniously and support each other. They need to develop a sense of vocation that leads them to a life of service and they need to manage resources, not in order to exploit natural and cultural life, but to sustain it. Above all these essentials, they need a hunger for justice, beauty and love which they can project into their work and into the interaction they have with their communities and nature. We define "community development" as the process

⁴ Vives (1971)

⁵ Huizinga (2002, p. 2)

⁶ Israel (1995, p. 1)

by which we build up a society that fulfils such requisites and with this in mind the Melbourne Centre for Community Development was established to seek the above transformation of the city by operating as a *universitas scholarium*, that is, a community of students with a systemic perspective.

The aim of this paper is to describe how we have integrated community building, research and education guided by Vives' ideals. We start by introducing the particular systems approach for identifying and analysing threats to community viability using Melbourne as a case study. A large proportion of the paper is dedicated to the analysis of these threats, for we wish to establish in a convincing manner, the grave predicament of the city, especially as it affects youth and their education. We then describe the type of responses needed, the role education must play to attain them, and the requisites it must fulfil to be effective. We end with an overview of a Master of Arts degree especially designed for this purpose.

2 Methodological Framework

Our methodological understanding of the term "systemic" has been described in several earlier publications⁷, so only a brief presentation is necessary here. We emphasize the multi-modal nature of living systems and integrate the humanities with the natural sciences, especially emphasising the normative nature of science. We believe that the humanities, especially as understood by the classical tradition of the Renaissance and the Reformation and which emphasised their interconnections⁸, must be included in a theoretical framework if we are to deal with human responsibility and "oughts" and stress the systemic importance of community for human life. Within this framework, we identify three domains in culture; each domain comprised by a number of modalities and represented by the parallelograms in Figure 1. The identification of these modalities is closely associated with the emergence of the various disciplines and their significance has been recognised from the beginnings of philosophy. Character has three modalities: ethical, aesthetic and juridical; community also has three modalities: operational, economic and social. Intellect has four modalities: epistemic, informatory, historical and credal. Nature also has three domains, each with its own modalities. Vitality has two modalities, psychic and biotic. Matter has four: regulatory, physical, kinetic and spatial. Order has two: numeric and logical. These modalities are homomorphic with each other, a useful property that not only helps to develop a general systems methodology but also to understand the diverse natural and cultural threats that can disturb a living system's viability. Homomorphic properties furnish a conduit for the two sets of arrows that link domains and modalities with each other; the first set is determinative and runs upwards and the second set is normative — indicating our responsibility — and runs downwards. By horizontally projecting three of the domains (matter, vitality and community), we can identify four axes of living systems. While material systems such as mountains, rivers and seas are not in themselves living, they nevertheless provide the essential habitat for the vital or biological axis — animals and plants — above it. Likewise, the vital axis provides the biological habitat for human culture, which finds its expression in a variety of social groups and institutions — such as school, family and clubs. Neither the intellectual nor character domains have horizontal projections, but they respectively provide the foundation and the ultimate aim of civic life as ought to be embodied in social institutions.

Perhaps this methodology may seem too structured for today's taste, but we regarded it as a necessary tool to find the various states of equilibrium of a non-viable community. Cybernetics has taught us that equilibrium and stability are essential for every living system, including communities and that there will be "...a state of equilibrium if and only if each part [of them] is at a state of equilibrium..."⁹. Our experience has brought us across many young

⁷ de Raadt, J. D. R. (1997a, 2000, 2006); de Raadt, V. D. (2002)

⁸ Melancthon (1999)

⁹ Ashby (1976, p. 83)

people who are victims of the chaos and uncertainties of post-modern society and who crave stability and direction to bring meaning and purpose to their lives. It is for them that we have developed this methodology and a corresponding educational programme in order that they may not only stabilise their lives, but also the communities to which they seek to belong.

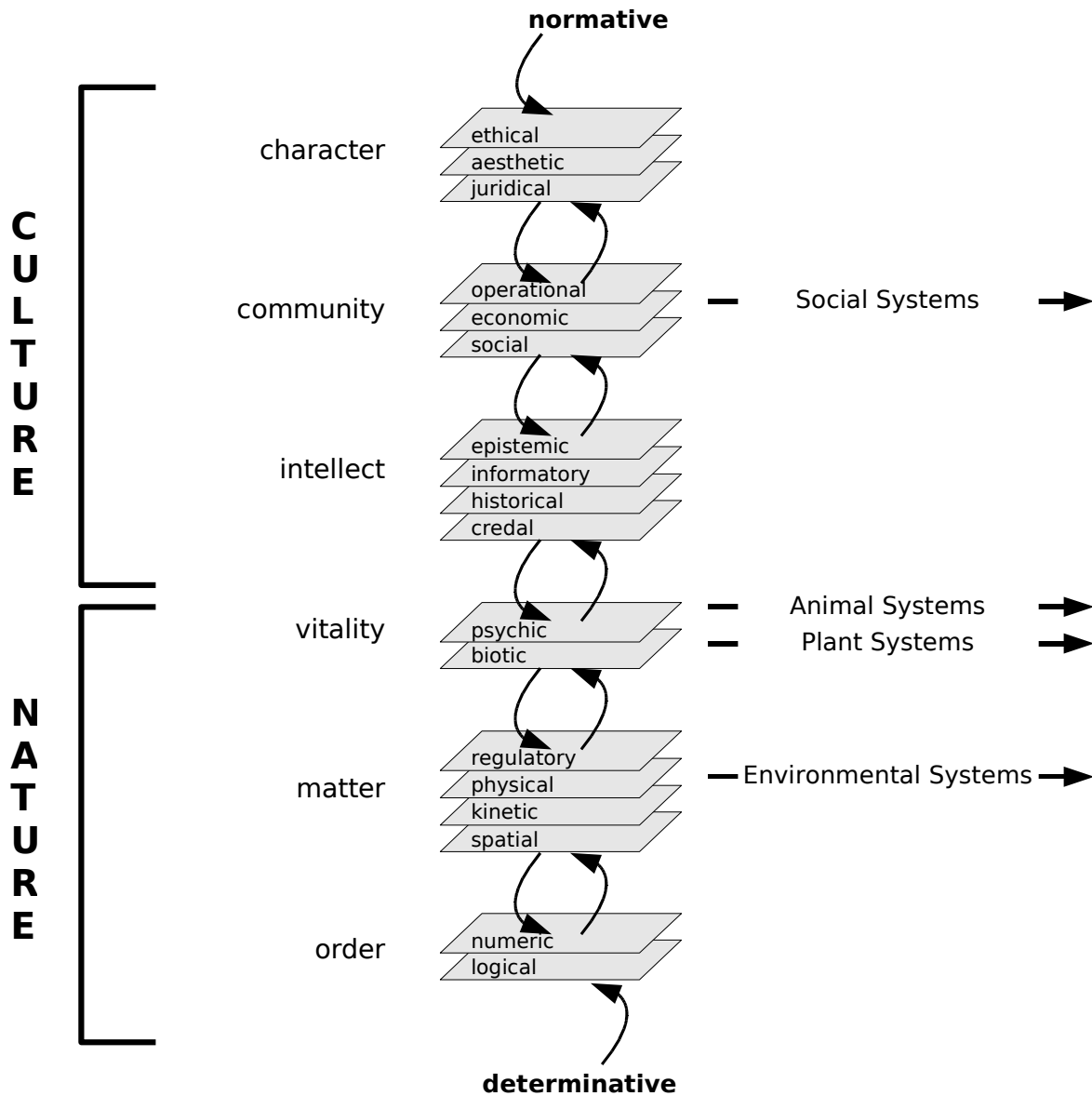


Figure 1: Domains and Modalities of Living Systems

3 A Model of Melbourne

Since equilibrium and stability are essential for living systems, either natural or cultural systems, we have developed a method to model the threats to the equilibrium of communities in a variety of modalities. Based on past work in several countries in Europe¹⁰, we have identified a number of factors operating in different modalities, that are essential to a

¹⁰ de Raadt, J. D. R. and de Raadt, Veronica D. (2004, 2005)

community's life but which are often out of equilibrium. This work was part of projects sponsored by the European Social Fund and directed towards regions in Europe that were losing population, especially young people. It was believed that the main factor behind emigration from these regions was unemployment. However, our studies revealed that unemployment was not an isolated factor in a community, but that it was systemically interconnected with other factors that had also changed with the rise of unemployment, such as education, ethics and social structure. This meant that solely addressing unemployment, in isolation from these other factors, was not a solution. Therefore, with the assistance of the above methodology we traced the links between these factors to establish the systemic nature of their instability in the community. By following these links we also discovered other factors contributing to instability.

Recently we built such a model of the city of Melbourne -- shown in Figure 2 -- and drawing on our prior research, selected nine factors, each belonging to a different modality, which are critical to the long term viability of Melbourne. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors and Modalities

Factor	Modality
ethics	ethical
work	operational
management	economic
social structure	social
education	epistemic
media	informatory
vision	credal
mental state	psychic
ecology	regulatory

As we have pointed out, the impact on the stability of the community depends to a much greater extent on the links between factors than in the factors themselves and therefore these links are also plotted in Figure 2. Although all factors have a systemic impact on the others and there is no precise sequence in the arrows in Figure 2 -- representing the links -- there is nevertheless a *primus inter pares* among these factors¹¹ which we have labelled "vision" representing the beliefs of the community upon which its cultural life is built. We will start by observing its impact on other factors.

3.1 Vision => Education

Systems scientists are well aware that the closed system's mechanical vision remains dominant in our times and has a powerful impact on all aspects of our culture. With the closed system's vision gaining prominence in the university, the humanities, the sciences that according to Vives restore our humanity¹², are gradually being dragged out and beyond its walls. Monash University closed its department of classics about 10 years ago and the University of Melbourne has recently begun a contraction of its Faculty of Humanities. If our

¹¹ Ortega y Gasset (1987)

¹² Erasmo de Rotterdam (1999)

humanities are being pushed out of the university, where will the large number of students that daily parade up and down Swanston Street and who attend the University of Melbourne and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology gain an intellectual grasp of what it means to be a good professional, let alone, a good citizen, a good husband, a good wife, a good parent, or a good friend? Yet, these are the essential roles that make up a civilized society.

There is sufficient historical evidence to show that the development of the natural sciences was driven by the erudition of the humanities. This may explain the decline in competence in the natural sciences that has paralleled the demise of the humanities in Australia as much as in Europe.¹³ It is now generally acknowledged that the Australian academic system is significantly inferior when compared with the past. A study carried out by the Australian National University and composed of interviews of more than 1,400 scholars from around the nation has produced disturbing findings about the conditions existing in the university classroom. These include lecturers fearing to fail students because of financial consequences and work overload. Some think that the award system has taken a complete step down; that is, a master degree is now equivalent to a bachelor degree offered a decade or so ago¹⁴. Similar conditions prevail in the school system with deteriorating educational standards¹⁵ and buildings, an increase of bullying and a shortage of teachers¹⁶.

3.2 Vision => Ethics

A closed systems vision is essentially secular and has brought with it the rejection of classical ethics, whether based on the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle or on the Samaritan ethics¹⁷ built on agape love¹⁸. These systems of ethics were based on the existence of God with which the closed systems approach became uncomfortable, despite its failing to replace them with a believable and viable ethical alternative. This left the field open for utilitarianism to rule unopposed in our economy and society and to impose its own doctrine described as:

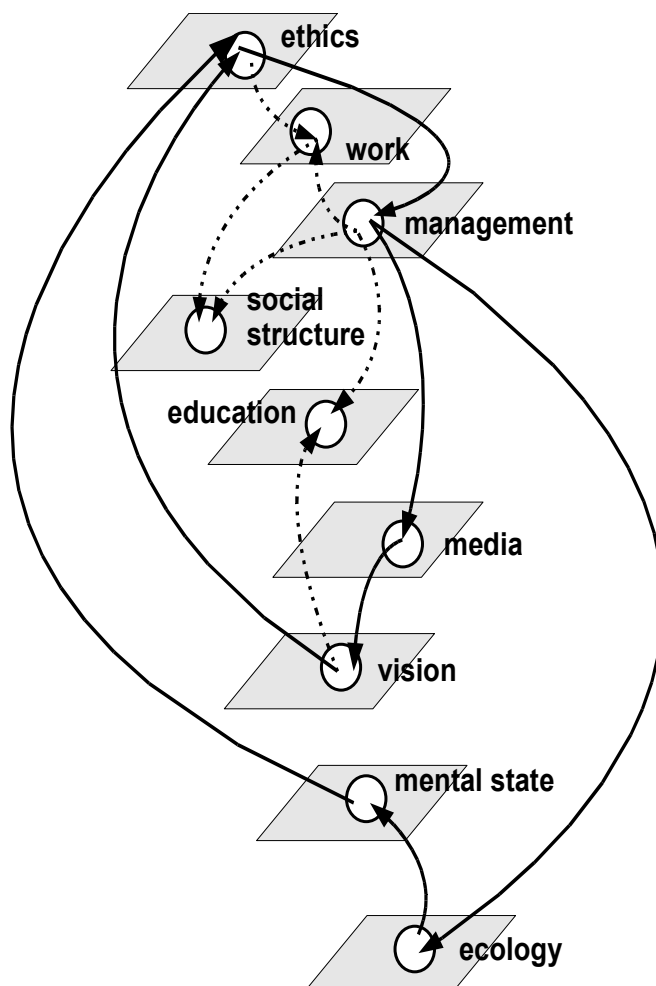


Figure 2: Melbourne Factors and Links

¹³ Scherman (2002); Rood (2007); Tomazin (2008)

¹⁴ Anderson (2001); Anderson et al (2002)

¹⁵ Topsfield (2007)

¹⁶ Edwards and Rumble (2006); Rood (2007)

¹⁷ de Raadt, J. D. R. (2006)

¹⁸ Boulding (1969)

The creed which accepts, as the foundation of morals, Utility or the Greatest-happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure.¹⁹

Mill's ethic is purely behavioural for there is no conviction or conscience behind it. It is therefore wholly inadequate to guide our actions towards a civilised human life. As might be expected, in the beginning, this morality encountered strong resistance from a traditional society. However, thanks to its application to economics and the opportunity it provided to make some people and nations rich at the expense of others, it progressively gained ground in Western society. An economic paganism has got hold of us with Mammon deciding what one ought or ought not to do in almost every issue of life including the goods and services we purchase, work, and even romance²⁰.

3.3 *Ethics => Management*

When the variables of the utilitarian formulae, pain and pleasure, are replaced by money, we have income and expenses, the raw materials of capitalist economics and management. Naturally, the greater the difference between the two, the greater the profit and the more “ethical” the management is supposed to be for, as Friedman preaches, “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits”²¹. Vast amounts of arguments have been forwarded to defend this approach. Yet, behind this argument lie two profound fallacies. Firstly, it assumes that the resources of the earth are unlimited and that unhindered economic development is possible without detrimental repercussions to people and nature. Development built on this assumption has had disastrous impact, as Raven, a British environmentalist points out:

Virtually all graphs of the consumption of resources, the extinction of species, and the destruction of the soils, the seas, and the atmosphere, show exponential growth, mostly growing much faster than the "population explosion". But the most striking single index of the need for radical change is that, for everyone on the planet to live as we live in the West, it would be necessary to have five back-up planets engaged in nothing but agriculture to support us and handle the pollution we produce. Yet vast billions of people in China, India, and elsewhere have embarked on the quest to live as we live. It cannot be done.²²

Secondly, advocates of capitalism assume society is homogeneous. They ignore the huge chasm that divides rich and poor and sets them at a disadvantage in every modality of life. Consequently, the pursuit of economic pleasure by the rich has devastating effects for the poor, especially when we consider that the poor represent the vast majority of humanity and the rich only a small minority. The relationship between the pleasure of the rich and the pain of the poor is curvilinear, that is, the constant pursuit of ever-increasing consumption of the rich produces a disproportionately higher amount of pain for the poor. We are all aware that our appetite for purchasing an assortment of goods manufactured in Asia – clothing, mobile telephones, laptop computers, flat TV screens – is satisfied by the work of people toiling in sweat shops and barely earning a subsistence income²³. This exploitation, we are told, is necessary for their employers to increase their profits and remain “globally competitive” and thus exercise their own brand of “social responsibility”. This disparity between rich and poor also occurs within a wealthy nation such as Australia and our city of Melbourne. We have “one city [but] two Australias”: the average annual income of the top 20% of Australia's

¹⁹ Mill (1969) p. 249

²⁰ de Raadt, J. D. R. and de Raadt, Veronica D. (2004)

²¹ Friedman (1970)

²² Raven (2005)

²³ McDougall and Doward (2007)

households is \$225,000; the bottom 20% is only \$22,000.²⁴ Between 1994 and 2004, the proportion of Australians living in poverty increased from 7.6% per cent to 9.9%.²⁵ A recent report studying the distribution of disadvantage in Australia²⁶ elicited the following response from the local press:

Australia's' neediest communities are being held hostage by a succession of social ills from joblessness to jail time, child abuse, poor health and limited education, according to a study that maps disadvantage across the nation. The research reveals a startling concentration of social and economic problems in vulnerable neighbourhoods, suggesting disadvantage multiplies once a community starts to fall behind.²⁷

To this must be added the exorbitant prices of housing and inability of young families to purchase their own home, partly due to investors who horde properties (certainly a limited resource) in order to profit from exorbitantly high rents, forcing people to a third-world standard of living and having to forfeit spending on health and food to meet housing costs²⁸. As a result, low income people who live in areas that are now becoming attractive to the rich are being forced out of their homes into areas that lie far away from their work or into rural towns that lack the infrastructure to accommodate them²⁹. The Docklands is an illustration in the very centre of Melbourne. Meant to provide housing for low income people, the price of its apartments can only be afforded by well-to-do couples on a double income and with no dependants³⁰.

3.4 *Ethics => Work*

Utilitarian ethics also dictates the choice of work. The idea of work as a vocation motivated by service to our neighbour has long been replaced by career ambitions that are supposed to generate a substantial surplus of pleasure in terms of satisfying one's own interests, social status and of course, monetary income. This is evinced by the choice of careers of young people. Our experience with university students indicates that their choice is mostly guided by the opportunities for well paid jobs. The favourites are commerce, marketing, tourism, sports management, a variety of technologies and prestige careers such as medicine and law. All of them offer substantial pecuniary rewards. Vocations that address needs such as teaching, nursing³¹ and social work³² are, as may be expected, at the bottom of the list of preferences. The favoured professions are oriented mostly to produce goods and services for the rich; the poor lose out.

3.5 *Management => Work*

The choice of profession is strongly influenced by management, since we live in a world where, despite there being so much work to do, one cannot work unless a job is "created" by industry. We must emphasise the determinative force management plays in the choice of work of people and which is reflected in the language of corporate executives, politicians and public servants when they speak of "job opportunities" and "increasing jobs"³³. Citizens and university students are brainwashed into believing, in accordance to the laissez faire creed, that the economic system is ruled, like the weather, by forces beyond our control, and that their choice

²⁴ Mackay (2007)

²⁵ The Melbourne Age, 30 August 2007

²⁶ Vinson (2007)

²⁷ Schubert (2007)

²⁸ Khadem (2007)

²⁹ The Melbourne Age, 29 October 2002.

³⁰ Millar (2003); Millar and Boulton (2005)

³¹ Dockery and Barns (2005)

³² Lonne (2007)

³³ The Melbourne Age, 1 October 2006; UNINEWS, 20 August 2001

of profession must fit accordingly. Young people we have questioned about this matter almost uniformly justify their choice of work by the job opportunities offered to them, as well as by the pressure that their parents exert upon them to study in order to elbow their way "to the top".

3.6 Management => Education

This deception is reinforced by the educational system which, by numbing young minds, has inculcated a closed system perspective dominated by marketing, accounting, engineering, technology and suchlike careers. This trend in education has not only been determined by the secular vision of our society but by the utilitarian, managerial doctrine that now inspires educational establishments. Universities such as Melbourne and RMIT are no longer led by scholarship but by managerialism³⁴ exercised by a "chief executive officer" who has replaced the former vice chancellor and principal. University departments are run as businesses that must generate profits even when it is at the expense of the quality of education³⁵. A disturbing by-product is the gradual replacement of academic staff who hold a vocational view of their profession by a new generation of pseudo-scholars who feel comfortable with academic commercialisation and the utilitarian ethic that buttresses it and who are satisfied to define their work on the basis of entrepreneurship rather than on the pursuit of truth.

Servility to managerialism has led universities to exploit students from poorer countries who come to study in order to obtain a Australian permanent residence visa rather than to equip themselves to work in their own country. This means that part of the universities' profits are earned not through legitimate educational and scientific activities, but through the abuse of immigration laws and the unhappy economic and social circumstances that drive young people to seek their fortune somewhere else.

A more sombre picture of this is provided by students who find it difficult to meet their living expenses and university fees and who are driven to "...product testing by unscrupulous companies and even turning to prostitution..."³⁶ A recent survey conducted by The Melbourne Age newspaper reports that 40% of female prostitutes working in city brothels are university students. A disturbing question is raised here: what kind of educational institutions are these that supply almost half the "sex-workers" in Melbourne's brothels from youths supposedly under their intellectual and moral care? Monash University's spokeswoman furnished a chilling answer to this question:

Obviously these ladies are adults and are free to make their own choices about what work they want to enter into. However, we do have extensive services for those who are suffering money problems. Any student can visit our financial counsellors, who are available on all campuses.³⁷

We may conclude that in a society ruled by the utilitarian creed, even the university believes that humanity's moral problems can be solved with money.

3.7 Work => Social Structure

Originally, the word economics (oikonomos) referred to household management. It meant the arrangement of work and resources in order to sustain a family or small community. The work of women in their homes under this arrangement was always regarded as economic activity. Capitalism reversed this so that the purpose of economics became the use of people and resources in order to accumulate wealth. The technological advances that accompanied

³⁴ Protherough and Pick (2002)

³⁵ Morton (2007)

³⁶ The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee (2005, p. xv); Lantz (2005); Kostas (2006)

³⁷ Reilly (2008)

this change were directed towards the industrial and economic machinery rather than to the household. After women were displaced from their original economic activity and started to join the workforce of industry and commerce, those who remained behind were the most vulnerable, mainly the elderly and the children. They were left to fend for themselves, or more accurately, they were shifted to child-minding centres and homes for the elderly to be looked after by emerging industries ironically called “caring” industries. A visit to an elder care home is a depressing experience, even if it is one of the better places. Elderly people are removed from society and denied the experience of observing the activities of different generations going about their everyday life. They are deprived of the stimulus of being part of a community. If they are well looked after medically and physically, they are lucky. Many elderly are neglected and even mistreated by those who are supposed to take care of them³⁸ and seldom visited by their “loved ones”: “Visit any medical ward, in any hospital, and you will find a large number of elderly people without a toothbrush or toothpaste, their bags of unwashed clothing sitting in wardrobes waiting to be collected, many don't have a shaver, and some, not even a comb.”³⁹

The other victims are children. Their neglect is creating developmental problems that show up once they arrive at school, such as in social competence, emotional maturity and language skills⁴⁰. Another report indicates that:

There is a growing body of evidence that children from the "mainstream" of suburban Australia are displaying serious physical, intellectual and emotional problems. We know about the seemingly inexplicable rise in behavioural disorders from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder to mild autism. We know Australian children are fatter than they should be and are getting type 2 diabetes. We know boys are falling further and further behind girls in academic achievement and that an alarming number are killing themselves.⁴¹

Much of this can be traced to the lack of family experience that today's children and youth enjoy. Parents complain about the conflict that exists between job and family⁴², a contest that is usually won by the job. This is even more of a quandary for single parents. Meanwhile, there is a growing number of unemployed men who have stopped looking for work, have abandoned all hope and dropped out of society⁴³.

3.8 Management => Social Structure

Despite the pious claims about social responsibility that corporations usually state in their promotional material, management has remained unmoved by the social hardship of the elderly, of children, of single parents and of jobless men. Their idea of “social responsibility” does not change their goal of maximizing profits and to attain this, they seek to control society; a practice not confined to private corporations but also embraced by government institutions run by the same utilitarian philosophy. We are in the midst of an emerging form of totalitarianism, exercised by the corporate state; that is, a partnership between corporations and the government. The emergence of such a new form of “totalitarianism” has recently been addressed by Naomi Wolf⁴⁴. In a recent visit to Australia, she pointed out that many of the laws and policies emerging in the U.S. resemble the measures taken by fascist regimes in Italy and Germany during the 1930's and that the degree of control exercised in Australia is even greater⁴⁵. Part of this tighter control and people's acquiescence towards it is rooted in

³⁸ Medew (2006)

³⁹ The Melbourne Age, 10 January 2005

⁴⁰ The Melbourne Age, 26 November 2003

⁴¹ Shanahan (2003)

⁴² Shaw and Cooke (2007)

⁴³ Colebatch (2006)

⁴⁴ Lyons (2007)

⁴⁵ The Melbourne Age, 5 November 2007; Bachelard (2007)

Australia's past and the regulated life forced upon its first settlers. It resulted in Lachlan Macquarie, an enlightened Governor, to be ceaselessly harassed for his emancipatory ideals⁴⁶.

However, in contrast to the old methods of coercion, the new fascism avails itself of much more subtle tools: manipulation through marketing and the media. For manipulation to be most effective, one needs a society that is the least structured, something like a Brave New World⁴⁷, where all sense of family and community have been abolished and replaced by a collection of individuals organised into a production-consumer line. In this way, every interdependence between individuals is removed and replaced by sole dependence on the corporate state. The most pliable target of this type of manipulation is the teenager. As a youth enters into the teen years, a process of changing dependence begins; there is a lessening of dependence on parents and an increase in dependence on people outside the immediate family. When this new dependence is on teachers, mentors, relatives or friends who provide a role model and have the welfare of the youth at heart, this transition process is a healthy one, for it results in the adolescent assuming responsibilities for his own life. Business has exploited this vulnerability in youth using marketing and advertising techniques, impregnated with a considerable amount of sex, to control and induce them to consume uncritically and avidly what they do not need or what is harmful, such as liquor and tobacco⁴⁸. Moreover, to expand the proportion of teenagers in society, management has expanded the span of teen mentality by pressing it backwards into the "tweenies" years and pushing it forwards into the thirties. It explains why so many people in their thirties still live as teenagers. This has not been helped by the concomitant decline of family values⁴⁹.

3.9 Management => Media

In an address to the Federation of University Students in Madrid in 1930, Ortega warned of the increasing power that the press would have over people's behaviour by substituting the earlier influence of the church and the university⁵⁰. Modern corporations avail themselves of this power to control people. Just as it has absorbed the university, the corporate machinery has captured all the media's branches, whether they be newspapers, television, radio or the Internet into its fold. Moreover, media corporations, such as the BBC, CNN and Rupert Murdoch's conglomerate have extended their sphere of power beyond national borders and have become commercial empires comparable to other large multinationals⁵¹. An intellectually neutralised university and a spiritually trivialised church have left the field open for the media to manipulate ignorant people at their pleasure. In the words of Carl Bernstein, one of the journalists who uncovered the plot behind the Watergate break-in:

The reality is that the media are probably the most powerful of all our institutions today and they, or rather we [journalists], too often are squandering our power and ignoring our obligations. The consequence of our abdication of responsibility is the ugly spectacle of idiot culture!⁵²

⁴⁶ Ritchie (1986)

⁴⁷ Huntford (1971)

⁴⁸ The Melbourne Age, 16 November 2007; Sharp (2007); Stark (2007); Dubecki (2008); Miletic (2008); Rush and La Nauze (2006)

⁴⁹ Zwartz (2008); Holroyd (2008)

⁵⁰ Ortega (1992)

⁵¹ Multinational Monitor (1995)

⁵² Wikipedia (2007)

3.10 Media => Vision

Having replaced the church and the university, the media then becomes the oracle, shaping the global culture by dictating what the citizen of the global village should believe. We may accurately depict the vision of the average person on Melbourne's streets as *tele-vision*; it is a new religion with its own prophets and priests. Virtuous heroes of the past have been dethroned and replaced by the anti-heroes of sport, rock music and film. Most of the behaviour of these modern priests stand in open rejection of the values that have held traditional communities together in the past. The media constantly flashes on its headings the bizarre self-indulgence, violence, rape, drugs and even incarceration of football players and starlets⁵³. The greatest victims have been the young people who have been brought up in social isolation from family and improperly educated and who flock into the centre of Melbourne because the old suburb culture supported by growing families and gardens has shrunk. For them the new community is comprised of reality-shows, chat-rooms and blogs⁵⁴ that have replaced the traditional channels of social interaction with a self-assembled kit of the "idiot culture".

3.11 Management => Ecology

Almost harmonising with the common root "eco", systems science⁵⁵, has stressed the homomorphism between economics and ecological regulation. For they are both meant to sustain, on the one hand, culture, and on the other, nature. Both have been disrupted by utilitarian management. In addition to being the chief architect of the environmental disaster that looms over us⁵⁶, state and industry have coalesced at international summits to block scientists informing the public about the alarming state of affairs⁵⁷ and funded conferences to discredit such scientists with research that is ostensibly biased towards the interests of big businesses⁵⁸. It is not only the natural habitat that is destroyed, but also the habitat of humans. The flow from rural to urban centres such as Melbourne is generated by industrial and financial centralism. This, in turn, has been increased by the drought and fires due to climate change that have struck small towns in Victoria⁵⁹. The city itself is undergoing constant infrastructural development, building more motorways (instead of public transport)⁶⁰, demolishing old buildings and dredging Port Philip Bay⁶¹ to allow the passage of bigger container ships loaded with consumer goods we do not need.

3.12 Ecology => Mental-state

Despite its wealth and great advancement in medicine, modern society has poor mental health; some of its psychic diseases such as anorexia and obesity were virtually unknown a few generations ago. Much of the increase in depression, fear and even the increase of suicide among farmers and aborigines⁶² can be traced back to the destruction not only of their physical but also social habitat. Yet, our contemporary individualism seldom spares thought to the human need of community which is almost as intense as the need of a beehive for a bee.

⁵³ Caldwell (2004); Cleary (2004); Hellard (2007); Taylor (2007); The Melbourne Age (6 December 2007); Associated Press (2007)

⁵⁴ Hill (2007); The Melbourne Age (29 November 2007)

⁵⁵ Beer (1994, 1995)

⁵⁶ Pacala and Socolow et al (2004); Morton (2007); Colebatch and Topsfield (2007); Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board (2005); Stern (2006)

⁵⁷ The Melbourne Age (4 September 2002); Friends of the Earth (2002)

⁵⁸ The Melbourne Age (27 November 2004)

⁵⁹ Millar (2007a and b)

⁶⁰ Kleinman (2006; 2007); Birrell and Healy (2008)

⁶¹ Bell (2005)

⁶² Stafford (2007); ABC Online (24 October 2006)

3.13 *Mental-state => Ethics*

A mental state dominated by fear, depression and even despair has driven people into two opposite directions. The first one, mostly associated with adults, leads to a stronger utilitarian ethic focused on greed. Melbourne's sobriety and egalitarianism that characterised it a few decades ago has given way to a show of extravagance and self-pursuit. It is visible in the transformation of the former family house of the past into pretentious, mansion-like buildings that have sprung up even in what were once considered modest middle-class suburbs. The second direction, being adopted by an increasing number of youth -- and most disturbingly, children as young as 12 -- is a combination of bizarre violence, drugs and alcohol, a situation described by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd as "...an epidemic of binge-drinking across the country"⁶³.

Our leaders have become at last aware that the "City is turning ugly". Victoria's opposition leader has warned us that "Melbourne is in danger of losing its position as one of the world's most liveable cities because of an epidemic of violent crime" after receiving "...figures showing that violent crime and assaults have soared in some parts of Melbourne by more than 75% in the last seven years"⁶⁴. And on releasing a new research paper on alcohol abuse, Dr. John Herron, the Chairman of the Australian National Council on Drugs, confessed: "None of us had any idea that one in five 17-year-olds were getting smashed at least once a week."⁶⁵ The word "smashed" is indeed appropriate, for it accurately describes what these youth are doing to their lives.

From the above analysis and with the help of Figure 2 we observe that the links generate two self-incrementing loops (links forming a loop are marked with unbroken lines), which will exacerbate the situation in the future:

$$\begin{aligned} & \textit{vision} \Rightarrow \textit{ethics} \Rightarrow \textit{management} \Rightarrow \textit{media} \Rightarrow \textit{vision} \\ & \textit{ethics} \Rightarrow \textit{management} \Rightarrow \textit{ecology} \Rightarrow \textit{mental-state} \Rightarrow \textit{ethics} \end{aligned}$$

In earlier research⁶⁶ we have postulated that, due to the exponential nature of these loops, one can discern three stages in their development. The effect in the first stage is almost imperceptible. In the second stage, the impact may be observed if one carefully searches for it, but in the third stage it is plainly evident. The alarm of politicians and community leaders at the predicament of the city is likely to be an indication that we have entered into the third stage and that a systemic collapse will follow unless we speedily intervene.

4 Intervening through Education

The very complex systemic links between the factors should leave no doubt that an intervention that addresses a single factor will not effectively pull the city out of its predicament. Any solution will have to deal with several factors at the same time and if possible, to generate a loop that is beneficial to the city and which counteracts the destructive loop in Figure 2. Our aim here is to generate the loop shown in Figure 3, linking the following factors:

$$\textit{work} \Rightarrow \textit{social structure} \Rightarrow \textit{management} \Rightarrow \textit{work}$$

The common approach of politicians and bureaucrats to generate desired social outcomes is to re-engineer peoples lives by writing policies. The implementation of these policies must rely

⁶³ Lunn (2008); Houston et al (2008)

⁶⁴ Gordon and Rood (2008)

⁶⁵ Frye et al (2008)

⁶⁶ de Raadt, J. D. R. (1991); de Raadt, J. D. R. and de Raadt, Veronica D. (2004)

on some form of coercion. We have argued in an earlier paper⁶⁷ that coercion may be legitimately exerted to restore justice, but the imposition of policies beyond justice leads to totalitarianism. Furthermore, in the same paper we argued that social circumstances such as those described in Figure 2 require more than people behaving justly; it requires a Samaritan ethic to compensate for injustices that will never be reversed. This will require a belief in such an ethic and an understanding of how it can be intelligently applied in a community to ensure its viability.

Rather than policy, we rely on education. Having done our research, we have introduced it into an educational programme that should in turn create a set of arrows that are not community action in themselves but that equip students for action in the community, moved by their own convictions and ethical commitment, rather than by acquiescence to policy and coercion. The programme aims at an initial effect on two factors: work and vision (see Figure 3). As for work (i.e., education => work) it helps students to reorient their work towards sustaining and developing the community rather than pursuing a career in the traditionally preferred sectors of big industry and commerce. The programme also seeks to inspire students to view the world (education => vision), not from the comfort of middle-class suburbs and corporate offices, but from the predicament of more needy people. This vision, if espoused, should make it clear to the students of the necessity of a Samaritan ethic (vision => ethics) if there is to be any hope for our community to be viable in the long term. A Samaritan ethic will encourage students to carry out the work (ethics => work) for which they have been educated. This work, being directed towards the community, will strengthen its social structure (work => social structure). In turn, a stronger social structure will be more inclined to control and manage its resources for the benefit of the community (social structure => management) and thus economically support those who work for its advancement (management => work). This would close a loop that would help reverse the destructive process that is now in effect in Melbourne.

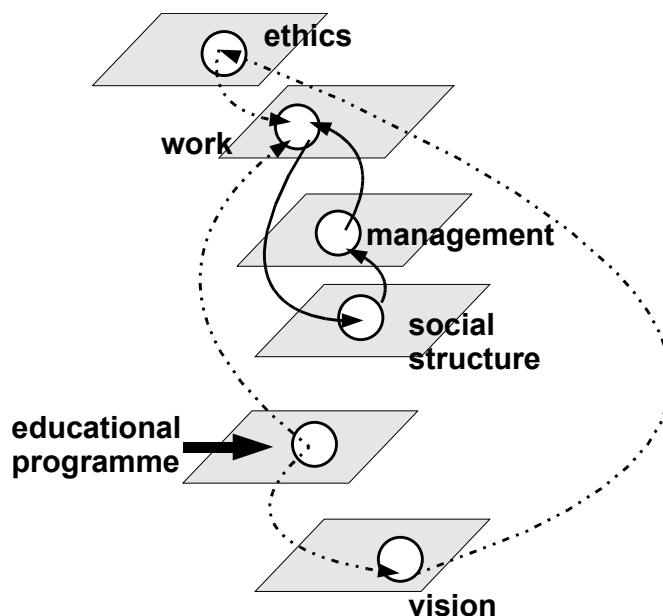


Figure 3: Planned Loop

5 Educational Programme Design

To achieve this, the programme must fulfil the following requirements:

Disciplinary Integration

The programme must be built upon a methodological systems foundation that integrates the diverse disciplines -- both natural sciences and humanities -- to facilitate normative analysis.

⁶⁷ de Raadt, J. D. R. (2006)

Common Professional Framework

The programme must offer studies that can be taken by diverse professionals and provide them with a common framework where they can integrate diverse disciplines into their profession and learn how to work together.

Community and Nature Focus

The programme must focus on the needs of communities and their natural environments rather than on the interests of big industry and commerce.

Visionary and Ethical

The programme must equip students to become visionaries in their communities. Their visions must in turn motivate them to set aside their self-pursuit and embrace an ethic of self-sacrifice for the benefit of neighbours and communities without necessarily expecting a lot in return.

Intellect

Translating a vision into action requires competence in analysis, design and implementation of ideas; the programme must equip critical and creative minds as well as provide practical tools to realise the vision.

Research

Given the vast domination of positivism and utilitarianism in the sciences, there is an urgent need to expand systemic knowledge, especially within the humanities. There should be therefore a significant emphasis on methodology, as well as method, in the curriculum. The syllabi should introduce students to systems research and provide a suitable foundation to continue, if they so choose, to a doctoral dissertation.

In summary, the programme should be suitable for a variety of professional people and university graduates — such as teachers, lawyers, social workers, urban planners, engineers, pastors and physicians. It should equip them to reorient and extend the horizon of their business or professional practices towards the community and open to them at least three alternative paths of professional development. It should either expand the scope of their professional practice or business by making it possible to set up common projects and activities with other professionals and businesses in order to sustain the community in which they operate. In turn, this should also enhance the horizon and opportunities of their own practices and businesses and ensure their long-term viability. Alternatively, it should equip them to move into a leadership and management role in the community such as serving in a municipal council or other political role, or serving in the directorate of an institution such as a hospital or a state-park organisation. Finally, it should also make it possible for some to follow an academic/scientific path by pursuing a doctoral degree that combines systems science and the student's own professional and disciplinary background.

Ideally, one would wish to introduce systemic thinking from the very beginning of a person's schooling. However, given the pressing needs of the city and the vast variety of skills that are needed, we have found that strategically, a masters degree combining course work and research is the most expeditious level to start an educational intervention. By making use of the knowledge that students already have and re-orientating it towards the community, we can reach our objective with modest resources in a relatively short period of time.

The design that we here propose is not new, for it borrows from previous work at a Swedish University⁶⁸. It requires two steps. The first step consists of identifying the knowledge that is required for community development (illustrated in Figure 4). It is accomplished by cross-associating modalities (set vertically at the left side of the figure) that are most important

⁶⁸ de Raadt, J. D. R. (1997b)

to address the factors and links we identified above. We have grouped this knowledge into four theoretical blocks: moral theory, social systems theory, systems methodology and cybernetics. The vertical arrows that connect these blocks indicate the normative and determinative interrelationship between these blocks. Moral theory supplies us with an ideal of the kind of society we ought to be, so that social systems theory does not turn into a purely positivist description about how society functions at present, but provides an understanding about how we can change into a responsible and civilised community. This understanding is founded on systems methodology which is, in turn, buttressed by cybernetics focusing on the regulatory and psychosocial principles relevant to social change. Theory must be applied, and this requires a body of practical knowledge which is illustrated by the blocks in the rightmost column in Figure 4, also linked by normative and determinative arrows. Social systems analysis and design methods is practised with the help of systems modelling tools such as data collection methods and SmCube⁶⁹, a specialised database and modelling software package. Finally, we stress character development as an important component of education. While students in the future will undoubtedly experience great satisfaction in their work, their endeavour to transform their communities will not always be received with appreciation. At times they will encounter outright hostility. This will not be encouraging for people who have sacrificed the high remuneration and other rewards that work in industry, commerce or government would have offered. They will need, therefore, to be motivated by love, grace and justice to press on according to their conviction and vision and this will be developed not only through student-teacher interaction in their studies but in their ongoing participation in a *universitas scholarium* that is characterised by these virtues.

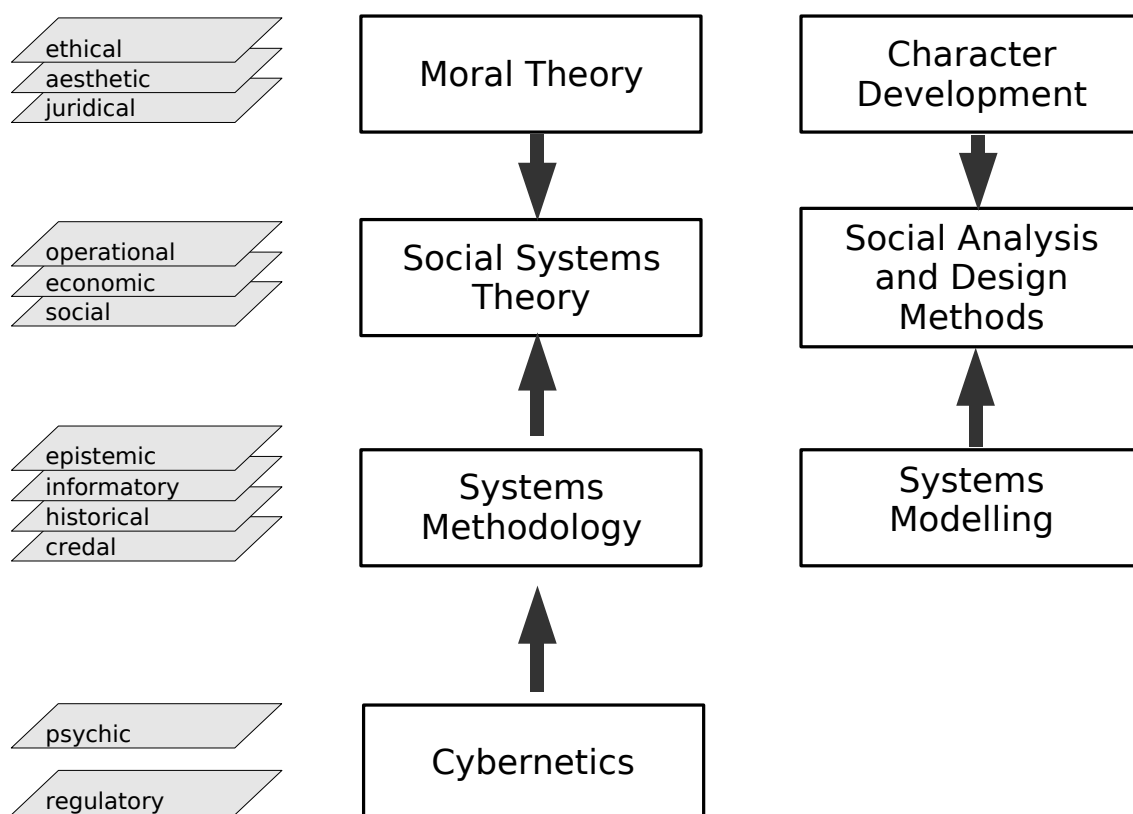


Figure 4: Learning Blocks

⁶⁹ de Raadt, J. D. R. (2001)

The blocks in Figure 4 do not represent an educational syllabus, but simply the fields of knowledge that are necessary for community development. We require therefore a second step to furnish a syllabus. Here again we encounter a sharp difference between a systemic education and the current practice of university teaching. In contrast to the fragmented approach to science, a systemic approach presents the sciences in a unified manner but without obliterating their uniqueness. Rather than the large number of compartmentalised subjects (termed "courses" in some countries) and corresponding syllabi in a conventional programme, the core of our programme has only one subject and one syllabus (naturally, extra electives may be added to the core). Students' pattern of learning resembles the spiral path of a glider climbing higher and higher, where learning successively oscillates between the modalities and their corresponding arts. They gradually ascend towards a higher level of understanding with each oscillation until they are ready to undertake their research project.

However, this does not easily fit the government accreditation system. For a democracy, Australia is a rather intellectually repressive society; one may be able to think as one wishes, but there are constraints over publicly expressing such thoughts and certainly over teaching them formally. Many academics happily sit on government boards helping them control science and education rather than defending their autonomy. As can be readily imagined, innovation in education, including systemic thinking, encounters a frustrating barrier of bureaucracy and other obstacles. This, it is claimed, is necessary to safeguard quality, an absurd assertion in the light of the correlation between the sharp increase in regulation and equally sharp decline in Australia's educational standards (a separate paper could be written documenting the emotional agony and frustration that a scientist undergoes when entering into negotiation with the educational bureaucracy). Therefore, we have presented each of the above oscillations as a distinctive subject to satisfy institutional requirements while preserving the systemic integrity of the programme. Each subject title reflects its scientific content, but it may need to be changed to fit the particular conventions of the place where it is taught. This is illustrated in Figure 5, where the programme has been sectioned into subjects with names that approximately reflect their content. Briefly, the content is as follows:

Philosophy of History

Given that the ultimate purpose of the programme is to equip students for a systemic intervention in their communities that is dynamic and thus part of history, we start our studies by laying out the philosophical presuppositions to justify such intervention. Specifically, we examine human oppression, redemption, Samaritan ethics and cultural restoration as supplying an historical axis upon which to affix a systemic methodology and methods.

History of Systems Thinking

The 20th century interest for the unification of science, whether it be articulated in von Bertalanffy's

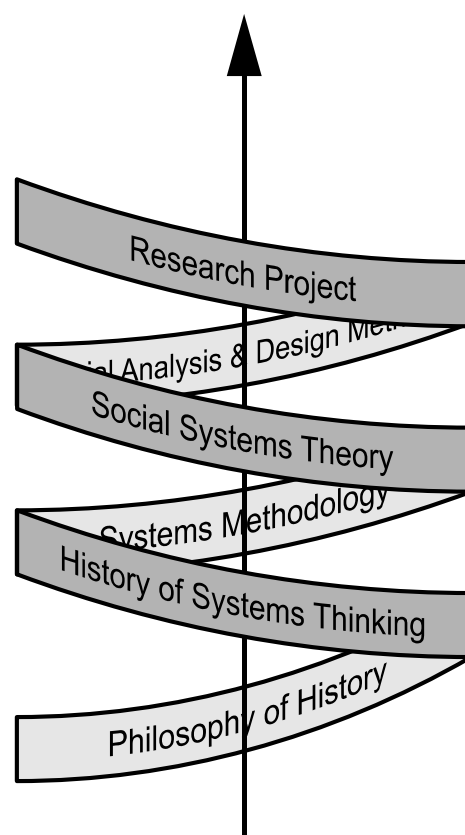


Figure 5: Educational Programme

General Systems Theory⁷⁰, Dooyeweerd's Cosmonic Idea (Wetsidee)⁷¹ or some other systems of thought is not new but is the rebirth of an idea that was pushed aside by modernism. We trace this idea from the work of Renaissance and Reformation humanists such as a Vives, Erasmus and Melanchthon to more recent scholars such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno⁷² in order to reintegrate the humanities into systems methodology.

Systems Methodology

Drawing from this humanist heritage, we now build a systems methodology for critical and creative thinking aimed at exercising normative discernment in the times we live. Students learn the role of the various intellectual modalities in shaping thought and add solidity to their thinking. They see the intellectual, social and moral consequences of people's beliefs and evaluate the impact of their own beliefs in these domains. They are exposed to the destructive effect of contemporary utilitarian positivism and are taught how to integrate ethics and a visionary foundation to their thinking.

Social Systems Theory

Next, we explain how community life and its component social systems furnish the scenario of culture. In particular we address the impact that wisdom (or the lack of it) and information (or disinformation) have on a social system. Students will learn to design social structures that assimilate the benefits of wisdom and information to serve their assigned tasks and where the lives of people and nature and their long-term viability as a community is the ultimate aim.

Social Analysis and Design Methods

From theory, the programme moves to practice and introduces tools for systemic application and action. Given the normative nature of community development, the emphasis is on qualitative methods starting with techniques for data collection and organisation. Students learn how to use SmCube to analyse and design social systems. They also learn to identify and define activities and systems to carry them out to counteract the threats to a community.

Research Project

Having completed their coursework, students now undertake a research project where they apply both the theory and the methods previously learnt. The project aims to integrate both specialisation and generalisation by blending the student's professional expertise with the wider needs of the community. The research should advance our understanding of how the various professional perspectives may be incorporated into a systemic intervention with a common language and a common purpose.

The programme will admit its first set of students in August 2008; thus we do not have empirical data to evaluate its reception. However, part of the material has been delivered in continuing professional education workshops, seminars and short courses accredited by the Australian Associated of Social Workers (our interaction with it has shown it to be, in contrast to government educational bureaucracy, an entity most open and supportive to educational innovation). Evaluation from these students have been uniformly positive, showing an appreciation for humanist and systemic thinking in the social work profession. It is well expressed in the list written by a social worker about the things she liked best in our seminar: "Interdisciplinary approach with arts, theology, ethics, history, systems, social work, sociology, education. Community development which breaks down silos, segmentation, contractions and

⁷⁰ von Bertalanffy (1971)

⁷¹ Dooyeweerd (1958)

⁷² Unamuno (1986)

my own experience. Inspirational and re-visioning for future directions of my work compared to pessimism, despair, frustration and questionable worth."⁷³

As systems scholars, we do not endeavour to intervene in society by re-engineering it. Our aim is to introduce change by inspiring its leaders with a new vision and an ethical commitment and to equip them with the intellectual tools to realize them. If we can provide this and through it dispel "pessimism, despair, frustration and questionable worth" even amongst a relatively small group of students, we shall be well satisfied. For, even if there is only a small number of them, humans have the gift to pass on their enthusiasm to others and thus multiply their impact to an extent vastly beyond their teacher's reach.

⁷³ Student evaluation of a seminar delivered in Coraki, New South Wales for the North Coast Area Health Service, 15 - 16 February, 2007.

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