

THE HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF DRAGON DREAMING

John Croft

update 4th April 2014



This Factsheet by John Croft is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/). Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at jdcroft@yahoo.com.

ABSTRACT: *The history and background of Dragon Dreaming, as it emerged within the Gaia Foundation of Western Australia, is discussed. Some examples of projects done using all or part of the Dragon Dreaming method are presented, and a deeper, underlying pattern is presented.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A HISTORY OF THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GAIA FOUNDATION.....	2
THE CHAORDIC AUTOPOETIC STRUCTURE.....	6
MEMBERSHIP	8
THE NATURE OF A GAIA PROJECT	9
HOW PROJECTS START.....	11
BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK FOR YOUR PROJECT	15
THE BEGINNINGS	16

A History of the Western Australian Gaia Foundation

When I was seventeen, having completed high school and planning to go to University, I like many other Western Australian boys of my generation, took a job on the wheat-bins, the silos where Western Australian wheat farmers deliver their grain before it is shipped overseas. Although I had worked for my father a little before it was the first time in my life that I had earned any real money. At the completion of this seasonal work, I returned to Perth and used my hard earned savings to buy many books, some of which are still part of the Gaia Library. One book which was to have a profound effect upon me was a book on "Buddhism", by Christmas Humphreys.

I was profoundly struck by the Mahayana Buddhist concept of the Bodhisatva, someone who is capable of achieving personal salvation, but who returns to work for the salvation of all beings. It was an ideal that at that age I dedicated myself to, and I have attempted to live by this ideal all my life since then. At the time I had just accepted a teachers' bursary, which enabled me to study almost anything I wished at University, but, in return for paying a modest living allowance, would compel me to work as a teacher for 4 years upon graduating. Nevertheless, in pursuit of my Bodhisatva ideal, I resolved when finished to travel overseas and work for the United Nations.

After my first twelve months working as a teacher, I had saved a considerable amount of money, and in our Australian Christmas summer vacation, I travelled to Europe. Whilst in London I discovered a MA course for foreign and Commonwealth teachers, in Education for Developing Countries, which I thought would help in my ambitions, and returned to Western Australia determined to earn the prerequisites that would enable me, once I had finished an additional 3 years of teaching, to come to London and enrol in the course.

By then, however, I had married a French woman whom I had met in Europe who had joined me in Australia, and so it was as a young father that I returned to Europe at the end of 1974 to begin my studies. My results at London University were such that I was offered enrolment in a PhD program, in place of the earlier MA, and so I started with the intention of studying the relationship between community education and community development in East Java. Various part time jobs, to help me cover some of our modest living expenses, led me to work in a project looking at increasing the relevance to village life for African primary schools in Anglophone Africa, and a vacation job with the International Extension College, promoting the concepts of "open Education" to the Third World. I was also a part time researcher at the UNESCO office of the Institute for International Educational Planning, in Paris, and at the International Labour Office at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva. I was ready to begin field my work in East Java, when with little money I took a 12 month job as a Lecturer in Community Education, Aboriginal Education, and a number of other subjects, teaching Trainee Teachers, back in Perth, Western Australia.

Saving money to return to Indonesia to complete my studies led to a personal crisis in my marriage, and to preserve our family, I used the money instead to purchase a house. But during that year, I had found an advertisement for employment as a coordinator of (non formal) community education in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, working for a World Bank funded Integrated Rural

Development Project in the poorest and last contacted province of that country, and in 1980 our family moved there. This was to be the turning point of my life.

In the years I was in Papua New Guinea, with a team of 9 full time workers we managed to organise an Adult Literacy Program with 400 part-time literacy teachers and 6,000 students, working in 12 languages. We worked installing 110 village water supply projects, distributed 17,000 chickens and 23,000 tonnes of chicken feed, with others we ran a youth program involving 318 youth groups and 218 women's groups. In addition we offered correspondence education courses, ran barefoot village midwife training programs, appropriate technology training (building furniture with an axe and some nails), and ran district planning workshops, reorganising extension services throughout the Southern Highlands. It was while engaged in these activities that the first initial understandings of the approach later called Dragon Dreaming were to emerge.

Unfortunately, my son, who was born in Papua New Guinea, developed a serious medical problem which required treatment in Australia, so on completing my contract with the Papua New Guinean government I returned home to Perth. There I transferred my PhD from London and Indonesia, to the University of Western Australia, my alma mater and to Papua New Guinea. There with a great loss of status, I worked as an extension officer for two years working with the Rural Youth Movement Council (RYMC), assisting in the establishment of community based projects. A change in government policy led to the abolition of the RYMC, and I was given the choice of further study or redeployment elsewhere in the government. When I mentioned that I was half way through a PhD I was asked if I would like to have 12 months off on full pay to complete the thesis.

My marriage had previously collapsed, and during the interim I had met my beloved Vivienne. During this time I was approached by many of the people I had been working with and asked if I could help them with their projects. The reply was, not until I finish my thesis, and as the year allowed was approaching an end, with the pressure to finish in time, I could see a big tsunami wall of people awaiting the end of my studies, and with the pressure I was not sleeping very well.

One night I had a dream. It was based on the thought – "Imagine there exists an organisation to which you could dedicate the rest of your life". A second part of the dream was of a group of people who had come together to create such an organisation as it did not exist. And finally in the dream was a name – "The Gaia Foundation". At 3 o'clock in the morning I turned to Vivienne and asked, "are you awake?" She answered "I am now". I told her I just had a really interesting dream and she replied, "So have I, before you tell me your dream, let me tell you mine. Imagine there exists an organisation to which we could dedicate our lives and it's called the Gaia Foundation".

We were astounded. And for a while nothing was done. My sister Deirdre completed a course in which we invited to attend the last night, and during the session were invited to participate in the forthcoming program. We refused, it seemed "too American", but Vivienne became friends with one of the presenters, who offered to pay for her to attend. When I saw the changes the course wrought in Vivienne's personal empowerment, I decided to attend too. At the end of the course the presenter suggested that commitment does not exist until one states to what a person is committed. He invited participants to stand up publicly on stage and declare their commitments. I sat and squirmed because I know I would have to declare my commitment to this organisation that did not exist.

I did, and as a result invited 12 people to come together to begin working on its creation. We agreed on its objectives

- ***personal growth*** - commitment to your own healing and empowerment
- ***community building*** - strengthening the communities of which you are a part
- ***service to the Earth*** - enhancing the wellbeing and flourishing of all life

The Foundation took its inspiration and organisation from the Gaia theory, of James Lovelock, Lynne Margulis and others, which showed that the Earth itself is “alive”. The biological and geological cycles of air, water and earth, driven by the fires of the sun are so tightly coupled within the biosphere that its forms a self-regulating metabolism, an evolving "living entity".

We created a constitution for the organisation, which we never used, and became immediately involved in project work. One of the first projects we became involved in was a series of film evenings on the issues of what would now be called “Ecovillages” but then was called Multiple Occupancy Communities. Earlier one of the projects I had done before the advent of the Gaia Foundation had been to help organise the Australian Association for Sustainable Communities, and we had produced, in association with Edith Cowan University, a series of video programs in relation to a tour of such communities we had earlier organised.

A second early project, in association with the Peace Education Foundation, was the Pathways to the Future programs. International research was showing, as a result of the heightened tensions of the Cold War under Reagan and Thatcher, that 80% of teenagers were of the belief that the world would end within their lifetime and there was nothing they could do about it. To change this pessimistic system of belief, we brought over 400 high school students to the University of Western Australia, at the close of the academic year at the time when teachers were busy grading the matriculation exam, working with lectures and facilitators in small discussion groups. Research on the attitudes of students before and after the Pathways program for 3 years was disappointing. It showed that while girls were more optimistic about the future they were also more active than their male counterparts. Boys, by comparison were both less active and also much more pessimistic. At the end of the sessions, it appeared that the children were much better informed, but the change in attitude had not occurred. The fourth program, led by Vanessa Lynne, created a difference. She led a guided meditation getting the students to imagine a day fifty or sixty years into the future, in which their grandchildren come to ask them to a picnic in nature. One of the grandchildren comes and asks, “Grandpa, Grandma, were things really so difficult in the past?” Children then had a chance to share their views. Then they were asked to connect to a second question, “We don’t have these problems now, how were they solved?” After further discussion a third question was raised, “What part did you play?” This session produced the shift in attitudes we were seeking.

A short time after this one of the people who had been involved in the early stages took a Sabbatical Year from her position as a graphic designer at the Curtin University of Technology, travelling around the world, and making connections for her personal project – creating a network she called “Designers for the Planet”. When she returned, she recounted a story of her travels. When staying in Hawaii, and knowing no one, she was leafing through the telephone book and she found a Gaia Foundation in

Hawaii. She telephoned the number, made contact and met with some of the people involved. Continuing on to San Francisco, and whilst recounting her experience at a dinner party, one said, "So do you know of the Gaia Foundation here in San Francisco?" From there she started hunting, and was amazed at what she found. There was a "Gaia Institute" in New York. Gaia Foundations in Chile, Brazil, London, Hungary and Malta. There was a Gaia Trust in Denmark, a Gaia University in Germany, a Club Gaia in Poland, all with similar aims and objectives, and all drawing inspiration from the Gaia theory of Lovelock and Margulis.

A series of other projects emerged. In association with the Western Australian government, we became involved in organising local currency LETSsystems. Created by Michael Linton, Western Australia, as a result of our work had 43 such systems, for a while trading as much as \$2.5 million per annum in goods and services.

There were many other initiatives. As a result of the work of Vivienne, we became involved in organising Experiential Deep Ecology workshops, running two or three every year for over 20 years. Both John Seed and Joanna Macy have repeatedly visited Western Australia in association with this work, attending workshops that were planned using the Dragon Dreaming method. These have had a huge effect upon subsequent environmental activism in Western Australia. Many of the Green politicians at both state and federal level have participated in these workshops, and it also had a huge effect in the long running Campaign to Save Native Forests. With one Gaia Foundation project, we brought the American activist and trainer, Fran Peavey to Perth, where she ran workshops in her work on "Heart Politics". Heart Politics is a way of running activism projects in such a fashion as to heal deep seated conflicts and achieve outcomes that are considered positive from multiple terms of reference and points of view. For example, following the example of Fran Peavey's "Heart Politics" we established "Listening Posts" in the centre of the timber towns in order to reduce the fears of local timber workers about the environmental protesters who were attempting to frustrate the destruction of the old growth forests, which were being turned into low grade woodchips for the manufacture of cardboard packaging and within six months were being thrown out as waste. By being compelled to hear the deep fears and worries of timber workers, who saw environmental activism in defence of protecting the forests as a threat, it enabled one woman, Jess Beckerling, a young university activist, who originally joined the protest for a weekend, but finished up staying for 2 years, to consider that we needed to discover a "win-win" strategy; where workers could have their jobs and incomes protected, enabling them to meet their financial commitments, and at the same time, that old growth forests could be protected from woodchipping. The support came in other ways too. One member of the Gaia Foundation, remembering the supportive packages sent from civilians to troops in times of war, organised with people who were unable to join the protesters to have "News from Home", with warm socks and gloves, water proofed matches, chocolate bars and a letter stating that they too supported those who were giving their time for the defence of the environment. Other members got involved more directly, joining the blockades in the forest, assisting with building or living on tree platforms for months at an end at the height of Karri trees. Still others blockaded and locked onto railway lines, in order to prevent woodchip trains from moving. Police arrested these protesters and charged them with "hindering a lawful activity". When the defending lawyers from the environmental defenders office (EDO), questioned the police prosecutor about the charge, they were told the protesters had prevented a train being loaded with woodchips. When the EDO lawyer discovered that the woodchips had in fact been illegally cut from the forest, the police changed the charge to read "hindering a train from moving", a charge that

potentially carried a maximum penalty of 6 months in jail. After 2 years in and out of court, without being given the opportunity to explain their motives, the Gaia forest activists, petitioned the magistrate to allow the defendants to address the court and explain the reasons for their actions. They were allowed, and although the magistrate was compelled to find the activists guilty under the law, he did have discretion in the matter in determining whether a record of the conviction be kept, and the size of the penalty imposed.

An \$100,000 anti-nuclear "Stop Uranium Reclaim the Future" (SURF) Pilgrimage Project, brought two people from the area affected by the Chernobyl Disaster, to the share children's stories, with traditional Aboriginal communities, custodians of the Uranium deposits, and carry the anti-nuclear message into communities and parliaments around Australia. This project resulted in a publication and a feature movie "Sickness Country" which was screened for the public.

One member created a discussion paper, about a possible Gaia House, suggesting it would be possible to find and renovate a small cottage, close to public transport, with a Permaculture Garden, grey water recycling, rainwater tanks, a Library and a meeting space, cared for by Gaia custodians. Within 2 weeks we were offered such a building, on condition that it never be sold. We took a mortgage to pay out one of the owners (the other donated his share of the building), and to pay for the cost of repairs. Unfortunately the Building Society with whom the mortgage was raised was purchased by one of Australia's leading banks, who were funding a Uranium mine inside a national park, against the wishes of the Aboriginal landowners. In frustration that Gaia money was in this way being used to pay for the establishment of a uranium mine (against Gaian principles), this led to one of our members paying out the mortgage with their own money, on a "gentlemen's agreement" that the loan be paid out at simple interest, merely 1.5% above the changes in the Consumer Price Index (measuring the rate of inflation).

In 24 years, in these and other ways more than 611 projects were attempted. So far, although a number of these projects have not been completed in the way originally intended, we have not yet had a single project that has run at a financial loss.

The Chaordic Autopoietic Structure

Many of the world's leading thinkers are currently engaged in the study of complex, autocatalytic, self-organizing, non-linear, adaptive systems, usually referred to as "complexity" or "chaos theory". They believe that such systems, perhaps even life itself, arise and thrive on the edge of chaos with just enough order to give them pattern, but not so much to slow their adaptation and learning. The word "chaord" was created from the first three letters of the words "chaos" and "order" to apply to such autocatalytic, self-regulating, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organisation, or system, whether physical, biological or social, the behaviour of which harmoniously exhibits characteristics of both order and chaos. These are entities whose behaviour exhibits patterns and probabilities not governed or explained by the behaviour of its parts. The principle is believed to be one of the fundamental organising characteristics of nature and evolution. Chaordic organisations are open with respect to their environments and exist in the periphery, on the edge of the

phase change between order and chaos.

Autopoiesis is a term created by the Chilean biologists Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana. An autopoietic structure is characterised by a system which

(a) maintains its defining organisation throughout a resilient history of engaging with environmental perturbation and structural change and

(b) acts to continually regenerate its component constituents in the course of its continued operation, through the exchange of energy with the larger systems of which it is a part.

Autopoietic systems, like the living planet, Gaia itself, when realised in the physical world, are living systems. The Gaia Foundation aims to maintain itself as an ecological living system.

The Gaia Foundation is thus designed according to chaordic, autopoietic principles. As such it cannot be an incorporated association, as the principles of incorporation seek to perpetuate a structure of continuous and unchanging bureaucratic order, as determined by the document of a constitution. While such constitutions do contain grounds for amendment, the organising principles for such an incorporated structure is linear and mechanical not chaordic, autopoietic and organic.

The Gift Economy

Long before any monetary economy existed, humans organised themselves based upon the principle of reciprocal giving of gifts. In such a gift economy we sought to sustain each other. If I am in need, and someone in the community can help provide for that need, they give me what I need. If another is in need, I do what I can to meet their need. A world based on such giving becomes a world in which resources are shared fully and equitably. The Gaia Foundation seeks to assist in the regeneration of such a gift economy amongst and between its members and the wider communities of which it is a part. We thus have no membership fees. Instead we act as a community which encourages its members to make any appropriate financial gift or provide any voluntary labour that they feel expresses their support for our organisation, its projects and its purpose. We aim to show that by giving, we can make a living and sustain ourselves. Since its inception the Gaia Foundation has been blessed with many such gifts on the part of its members.

Governance

In the Gaia Foundation no-one is in charge. There is no single centre of power in the Gaia Foundation – the centre is distributed amongst those that call themselves members and is everywhere. There is no "executive committee" or self-perpetuating Board that governs the organisation. This "empty centred" design enables members to organise themselves at any scale while keeping power, authority and decision making within the projects at the smallest or most local level that includes all relevant and affected parties. The Gaia Foundation is made up of a potentially unlimited number of member-created projects that create new centres of activity. Members thus take the initiative and respond to the initiatives undertaken by others, in accordance with our three core principles. The organisation is therefore, polycentric, having multiple points of contact, coordination, ways of communicating and leadership. Every Gaia Foundation member has the right to create any new project of the system as long as it embodies the common principles and seeks to advance the three purposes of the Foundation. Participation is always voluntary, and no one can be forced to participate in something they do not support.

In an era of accelerating change, the people, organisations, and national economies most likely to survive are those with the ability to adjust and adapt. As with living ecologies, the maximum energy of the Gaia Foundation's organisation is contained in its periphery, its ecocline or the edge with which it engages with the wider world.

Every aspect of the Gaia Foundation can and is changing as the organisation evolves to its circumstances through the changing nature of the projects in which it engages itself with individuals and the world. Members govern themselves and the parts of the network of projects in which they participate. Projects of the Foundation are not organised on bureaucratic principles, but rather exist as an "adhocracy". They continue for as long as the community of members who create and support the project continue to sustain and maintain the project. When members cease or lose energy for a project, it naturally comes to an end.

Membership

At the heart of the Gaia Foundation is its three principles. They constitute the fundamental body of belief that binds us together. Any individuals or institutions that subscribe to the principles regardless of race, class, gender, sexual preference, age, nationality, marital status, religious or political affiliation, are eligible to be considered members. Membership is conferred through these eligible individuals and organisations making the effort to call themselves "members of the Gaia Foundation". The Gaia Foundation works to build bridges between groups of people that may otherwise not be in close relationship. It has members drawn from many different national and religious backgrounds.

We enjoy and aim for tremendous diversity among our members – in profession, philosophy, perspective, and approach. Members are those playing roles in catalysing the ongoing emergence and evolution of the Gaia Foundation through their activities in the Foundation. They are individuals attracted to new ways of thinking, those leading transformative organisational or institutional change, and those committed to creating powerful new tools for innovation, learning and action.

Destroying our life-support systems and calling that progress, is insane. In insane cultures, most people are sleepwalkers, perpetuating the insanity. It appears with individuals as stress, sickness and declining quality of life; in communities in disfunctionality, distrust and fear; internationally in a never-ending war against terror; and biologically as the largest extinction since the the dinosaurs.

How to reclaim our future, avoiding denial and building new, and abiding empowerment that truly makes a difference, within the individual and within the community? How do we awaken to our human destiny? What is our purpose in life - and how can we ensure that we act in harmony with our true purpose?

We are a part of the Great Turning - beyond the confinements of the Industrial Growth Trance - towards a new Life Sustaining Culture. Signs are appearing everywhere, but the outcome is not predetermined. To make the transition will take all of us - individually and collectively, discovering sources of personal power beyond our wildest imaginings, working collectively as a species for the first time in history. Sitting on the fence is to choose suicide. Marianne Williamson has said "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our Light, not our darkness that most frightens us." Come and join the most amazing dance possible.

THE NATURE OF A GAIA PROJECT

Dragon Dreaming lives through the projects it undertakes and supports – if ever the projects were to stop, Dragon Dreaming could in a very real sense be said to stop too.

But what constitutes a project? How do projects start and how would you or other people get involved in a Dragon Dreaming Gaia Project?

The word project literally means “to throw” – it is a verb, as well as being a noun. Dragon Dreamers are “activists” and Gaia Projects exist as “actions”, and probably have more in common with the verbal meaning of the word “project” than as a set “thing” – as the noun would suggest.

You can never understand something until you try to change it. As you change yourself, you discover yourself. As you change the world you discover the world. Your life’s project is the way in which while you are changing yourself you simultaneously change the world.

It starts with intention. For the Gaia Foundation of Western Australia

"Our intention is to lovingly empower ourselves and others to know oneness with Gaia, the living Earth, through taking courageous and joyous action, now"

But if a Gaia project has this sense, what is this "action" that is "thrown" in this way? A Gaia project can be defined as

"any series of tasks or activities, undertaken by any person, that helps to create a vision or achieve a goal for the future in line with its objectives."

What is "thrown" in the project is the initiator's intention, or vision of the difference the project could make, in their own lives, and in the lives of others who get involved.

Thus Gaia Projects all start in as a dream of a person, that aims to make a difference in the world. But this is probably true of any project, as well as being the nature of a Gaia Project.

To be a Gaia Project, the project has to meet three simultaneous objectives –

- Firstly it has to be a project of **personal growth**, for the people who get involved. The project aims to extend our capacities and allow us to live to a greater extent beyond our self-imposed limits, out of the full potential that we have as human beings. This means that the project has to have a commitment to the healing and empowerment of you and the other people who get involved.
- Secondly it has to be a project of **community building** - strengthening the communities of which you are a part. Community is a term that is frequently abused, used in cases where communities do not exist. We will look at the true meaning of the word "Community" later. For the moment let us say that the communities of which we are members are always more than human.
- Thirdly it has to be a project in **service to the Earth** - enhancing the wellbeing and flourishing of all life. The Earth gives so much to us which we tend to take for granted. As Daniel Quinn has suggested, our culture is a culture of "Takers", not of "Leavers" or "Givers". Gaia Projects aim to reverse this, to give back to the Earth in gratitude for what the Earth has given to us.

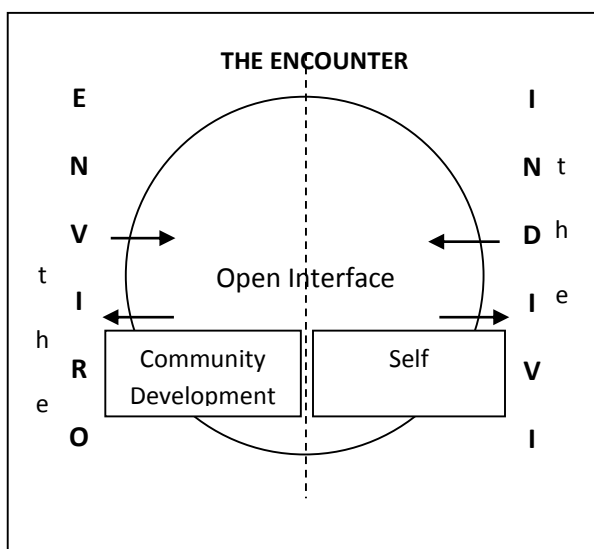
In this way any action that meets these three objectives, and acts out of the intention of the ordinary men and women, can be called a Gaia Project.

Projects may be of three kinds.

1. Firstly, there are those projects that are undertaken from the start as “a Gaia project”. These are projects in which people may initiate, and that are from the start considered by themselves and by others as “projects” of Gaia. They may advertise themselves as a “Gaia Project” to other people who have been involved in Gaia project activities in the past, and thus may draw upon other resources of other projects or upon individuals involved in other projects in turn.

2. Secondly, there are those projects that may not start as “a Gaia project”, but to which Gaia Members lend personal support in some way as if they were all members of the same organisation. In this way the project may be considered by some members that they meet the objectives of the organisation, though in all other senses the project is independent from the that organisation. In such cases sometimes the organisation may wish sponsorship from or seek to use some of the resources of other Gaia Projects, in securing their success.

3. Finally, there are those projects that seem not to have anything to do with the Dragon Dreaming process. They may be started by other organisations, for their own purposes, and as a member you may decide to support this project as their own personal project of personal growth, building community and service to the Earth. In these cases, it is up to the individual involved whether he or she informs other members of this project that they are engaged in a personal Gaia Project.



Here we are concerned only with the first type of Gaia Project, although what follows may be of concern for those Gaia Members and even others involved in the other kinds of projects as well.

HOW PROJECTS START

Every project that has ever started has been the result of a profound community encounter, a meeting between an individual “self” and the environment of their “world”, a world that is

considered to be “non-self” or “other”. This meeting if it is to be successful requires a contribution, an “input” from both the self and the world. At the same time, if it is to be truly successful it produces a change, or a development of the world, simultaneously producing a change, or an education of the individual. In this way “community development” and “self-education” are mirror images and

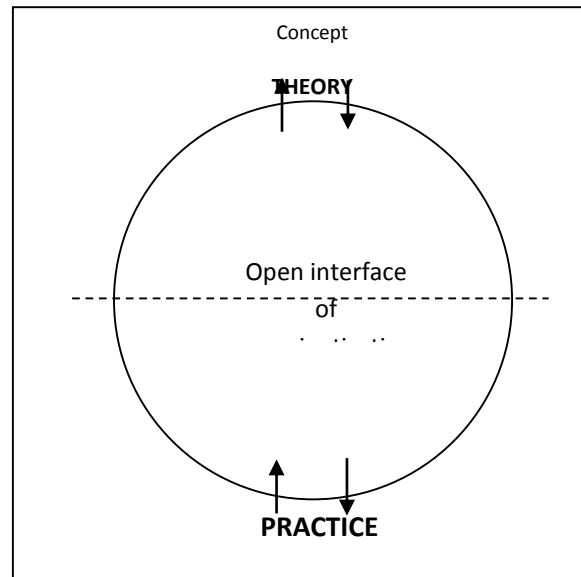
opposites, one – “development” being what happens to the world as the result of a project – the other, “education”, being what happens to the individual.

The nature of this development is frequently misunderstood. “Development” is a word that is frequently abused in modern usage, as many “development projects” are in reality little more than forms of profound destruction and profound damage – damage to a place, damage to a community and often damage to the nature of the individuals who are involved. In actual fact, in order to discover the true nature of development we need to return to the true meanings of the word. “Development” is comprised of three elements

- de- = a prefix meaning “to remove”, to “free” or “liberate”
- volupe = from Latin at the fall of Rome, meaning “those things that tie us down”
- -ment = a suffix meaning “the process of”

Thus development can be defined as “the process that frees us from those factors that hold us down”. True development, by its very nature involves liberation and freedom, factors that we will return to consider later.

Just as we misunderstand the nature of development, so we also misunderstand the nature of the process of education. People confuse education with schooling, as though the two are the same. Schooling, from the Greek “skhole” meant “leisure” and was seen as something *apart from*, or as a *preparation for* life. It is a process based upon an assumption of the ignorance of the learner and the knowledge of the instructor, a transfer of learning which also has the meaning of “to discipline, bring under control, deliberately train or accustom”. Many people mistakenly believe that education stops when formal schooling also stops. This is far from the truth. Education is, always has been and always will be a lifelong process of learning, from the cradle to the grave. It comes from



- e-ducare = Latin meaning “to out lead” or “to draw out what is inside”.

- -tion = from Latin -tionis, a suffix meaning “the action of”

Education thus means the “*action of achieving one’s inner potential*”, rather than having something added by way of instruction, or training.

We need to recognise education comes in three separate types –

1. Formal schooling – organised between pre-school or kindergarten, primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational education systems. This learning system is paid for by moneys that are publicly or privately collected for the purposes of “*education*”.

2. Informal or incidental education – organised through mass media news and documentary programs, on-the-job learning, and the learning that occurs through participating in the everyday social life of the community.

3. Nonformal education – is education that occurs through the act of engagement, leading to a reflection between thought and action and back to thought, in a reflexive “*praxis*”, a process called by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire “*conscientisation*”.

Gaia Projects can from this point of view, be seen as a project of Nonformal Education, although it may occur in formal or informal contexts.

The process of education and development always occurs best in community, which both produces and is produced by these two processes. The word community is also widely used and frequently misused, in ways that have robbed the word of much of its meaning. Politicians are especially fond of the word. Today, what are said to be communities are not, as they are merely accidental collections of people who have something in common, as though that is the origin of the word. But this accidental collectivity is not really a community.

Like development, community is comprised of three elements –

- com- = a Latin suffix meaning “with”, “together” or “jointly”
- -munis- = again an old word from Latin, coming from Indo-European, meaning “a gift”, or “a reciprocal link” or “exchange”
- -ity = from the French -été, and from Latin -atis, which means forming or having a quality or condition.

Thus the community can be defined as “those with whom we have a reciprocal giving of gifts”, or “the local links or exchanges that tie us together”. A true community is therefore characterised by the quality of communication of its members. Is this communication giving, respectful, supportive and generous – because only when the communication has these qualities can we say that a community, in reality, does exist. It is now easy to see why we have so few communities nowadays, or why the modern condition of anonymity, in which everything is bought or sold, rather than being gifted or donated, is so destructive of community.

Gaia Projects are built around this concept of the “authentic community”. Everyone involved in a Gaia Project is involved in a profound sense of gifting – to themselves; in their own education and self-development - to each other; in building a sense of community - and to the wider world of which they are a part.

Thus this first dimension, of self-other, or individual-community-environment, provides us with a one dimensional model of a project. It leads us naturally to consider a second dimension of a project based upon “conscientisation” - the reflection of thought-action or theory-practice.

Any project that is based upon action, or practice, without being based upon “thinking about the world” is blind. Similarly those projects based exclusively and only in thought or in theory, never leading to action or practice, are irrelevant. Those projects that are most outrageously successful are always those that achieve the best integration between theory and practice.

As before, there is a series of reciprocal exchanges between the project and theory and practice. Individuals always start the project with a theoretical understanding of how the world works – a view based upon the cultural common sense that they have accumulated over the course of their life. This common sense view of what is real is, however, a form of consensual delusion. Other realities are possible, indeed everyone’s reality is a personal construction – and no two people live in the “same world” – as their view is built out of their own experience. Some of these experiences come from before birth, in the nature of one’s experiences in the womb, others come from early childhood, from one’s family of origin, from experiences at school and with peers. Layer upon layer gets built, and in this way we eventually build an interior model of how we believe the world operates. Into this model of the world we install a “self-image” – a model of ourselves. This comprises the world we inhabit. Our actions are shaped, not by what will actually happen, but rather by what we believe will happen. Our “self image” also determines what we believe we are capable of doing, of who we believe ourselves capable of being. It sets a ceiling, against which we continually measure and limit ourselves. Thus the “self image” each of us is built out of pre-judgement, it is literally a form of “pre-judice”. Indeed it is the worst form of prejudice, far more damaging than any racism or sexism. Unlike the latter, because it is prejudice we carry against ourselves – it is the only form of prejudice from which we never escape. But development, as we have seen promises liberation – and the Gaia Project offers a way of liberation.

This is the essential nature of a Gaia Project. As one engages with the project, one starts by contributing from within the safety of one’s pre-existing view of self and the world. But the process of engagement will transform both of these. No-one who completes a project is ever the same person they were when they started – a measurable transformation has occurred.

It is not just a transformation of one's thoughts, or the theories by which we live our lives. It is equally a transformation of our skills, the practices and actions by which we live our lives. What is a human being capable of doing? Who are you capable of being? Do you know? When one studies history, one finds innumerable examples of people who have achieved amazing things. We are caught in a time of historical crisis where we are being called forth to be what we were born to become – agents of the process by which the Universe transforms itself, achieving thereby its own salvation.

Every Gaia Project, no matter how big or small, has this transformative potential.

BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK FOR YOUR PROJECT

Central to our conception of the world is a model of power. Since the age of the ancient Greeks, we in the west have believed that those things that are real have an ability to endure. That which is ephemeral is seen as not real, something that is just transitory. In classical physics, for instance, material objects were real. Force was applied to these objects to get them to change position. The acceleration produced was achieved through the application of power, and energy was viewed as the capacity to do this work. Gregory Bateson, the systems thinker has argued

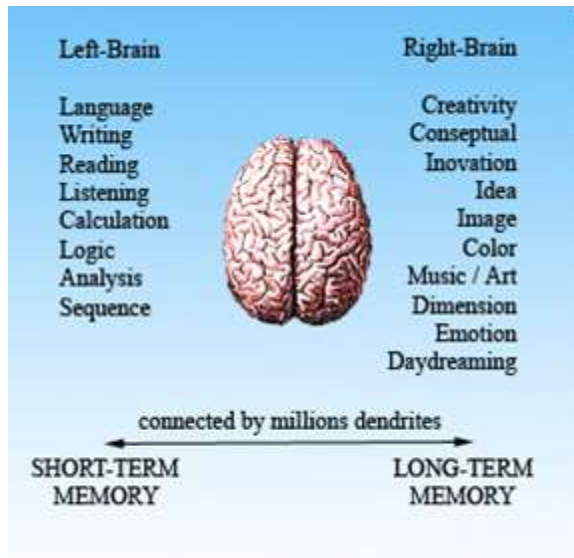
"The myth of power, is of course, a very powerful myth; and probably most people in this world more or less believe in it... But it is still epistemological lunacy and leads inevitably to all sorts of disaster... If we continue to operate in terms of a Cartesian dualism of mind versus matter, we shall probably also come to see the world in terms of God versus man; elite versus people; chosen race versus others; nation versus nation and man versus environment. It is doubtful whether a species having both an advanced technology *and* this strange way of looking at the world can endure...

The whole of our thinking about what we are and what other people are has got to be restructured. This is not funny, and I do not know how long we have to do it in. If we continue to operate on the premises that were fashionable during the Pre-Cybernetic era, and which were especially underlined during the Industrial Revolution, which seemed to validate the Darwinian unit of survival, we may have twenty or thirty years before the logical *reductio ad absurdum* of our old positions destroys us. Nobody knows how long we have, under the present system, before some disaster strikes us, more serious than the destruction of any group of nations. The most important task today is, perhaps, to learn to think in the new way."

The two separate dimensions presented above, when combined, provide us with the kind of cybernetic connection between the world situation and how we see it. For example, take the two separate dimensions and superimpose them, one on top of the other. You get a synthetic model of empowerment that will assist you make any project you do highly successful.

This is the beginning of the journey that you will take in making your dream come true. Dreams you hold in the palm of your hands. Dragon Dreaming will help in shifting your power to make this dream come true.

THE BEGINNINGS



When did Dragon Dreaming Begin? As a form of training it has clearly had its origins in the Gaia Foundation of Australia's work over the last 24 years, but it is also clear that the process of Dragon Dreaming is much older than that.

In fact when giving workshops in Dragon Dreaming people who have in the past conducted successful projects recognise the four quadrants and the twelve steps in what they have done. So when did the process of Dragon Dreaming begin?

I suspect that Dragon Dreaming is as old as humankind if not older. The four steps are reflected in the deep architecture of the human brain.

For example the human brain is divided into two hemispheres, the left and the right, with the right hand brain controlling the left side of the body and the left brain controlling the right side. The central connection between the two hemispheres is the corpus callosum, buried deep in the brain that allows the right and left parts of the body to generally work in a coordinated fashion.

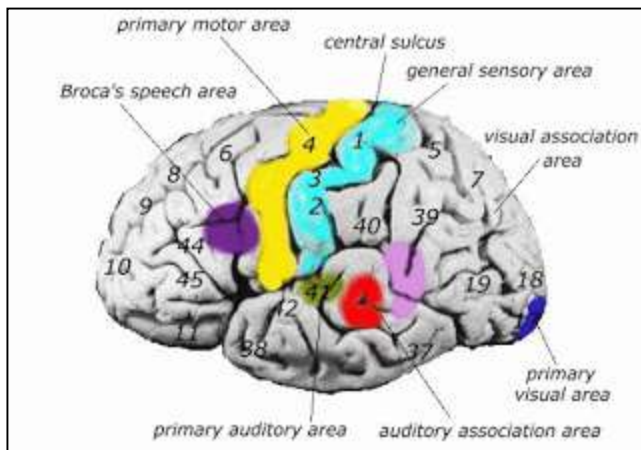
These two parts of the brain, however, also have additional functions that are very different. The right hand brain is responsible for non-sequential gestalt or pattern recognition tasks. In the language of Dragon Dreaming the left brain is responsible for Dreaming and Celebrating. It is where we find the activity of day-dreaming, of ideas, creativity and innovation. It is also linked to the emotions and thus is strongly linked with both motivation and celebration. Our longest memories seem to be most resident in our right hemisphere. The left hemisphere by comparison, is the centre of our short term memory, and is the place in which most sequential tasks are organised. By comparison to the right hemisphere the left is the site of analytical thinking, of logic and language. It is the site of reading, writing and listening, the arts of communication with others. It is also the centre for calculation, and in Dragon Dreaming terms seems most associated with the Planning and Doing functions of the process.

The connections between the left and right hemispheres enable us to function as a balanced personality, able to be creative and recognise patterns at the same time to work logically. But humankind seems to have an inbuilt balance to favour sequential tasks over the other, as 85% of the population is right-handed, indicating a dominance of the left side of the brain. This dominance is not problematic so long as the connection of the corpus callosum is strong, and the connection between the two sides of the brain allow easy communication.

But our culture has not been balanced since the rise of Patriarchal cultures in the Middle East, some 7-8 thousand years ago. The split occurred first with the ruling class. Here, with the establishment of priest kings, the masculine ego came to be associated with the short term planning and doing tasks, dominating the feminine concerns for multi-tasking, pattern recognition and the emotions. The tasks of the building of the pyramids and great temples of the ancient world were synonymous with this emergence of left dominant thinking, and the dominance of hierarchical male elites over the rest of society.

By the end of the Late Bronze Age, the shift in childrearing practices, and the increased authoritarian structures of childrearing, found in China, India, the Middle East, Israel and Greece, saw a restriction in permissive parenting and an increased importance on "disciplining" the child. Children in such cultures more often felt unsafe, isolated and alone, and this created a more fearful less trusting individual, and led to a restriction in the neural connections, particularly the emotional life, connecting left and right hemispheres. This led to the dominance of the left brain extending downwards throughout society, no

longer being confined to the dominant ruling family or aristocratic upper class. Planning and doing achieved a dominance over dreaming and celebrating, a dominance which in the so called "civilised world" it maintains to the present day.



The brain architecture also supports the second division within Dragon Dreaming, that between Theory and Practice.

Using Brodmann's functional areas of the human brain we can see that the brain is divided horizontally as well as vertically, though with much less clarity, by the primary motor area, responsible for organising most of our voluntary movements. Immediately behind this motor area is a sensory area, where most of our sensory input from our bodies, and from the external world is organised. The close connection between the sensory and the motor functions is necessary as immediate feedback is required between our senses and our muscles in order to make sure that the motor functions achieve the tasks we wish for them. Primary sensory functioning for hearing is found in areas 41, where hearing takes place, and where the processing of sound to give meaning in area 4, interior to our ears. Paradoxically the processing of sight does not take place behind the eyes, but occurs right at the back of our brain, with

visual processing occurring near area 18 and visual association and memory being found near area 7. It is our senses, hearing and sight in particular, that connect us as individuals to the practical world.

By comparison, the theory part of the brain is associated in the forebrain, areas 6, 8, 9 and 10 with extensions to Broca's "speech" area, near 44. It is here that the processing of information occurs, and those attributes specifically human, the thinking functions of foresight and hindsight, are located. Area 6 is an interesting one because it seems to link the "thinking" parts of the brain to the motor activities. It is in area 6 that most of the planning of our activities seems to be located. By contrast, the "evaluation" of "monitoring our progress" seems most located in area 5 of the brain, just behind the sensory cortex where our sensory information is processed.

This patterning of the human brain closely follows the pattern of the four quadrants of Dreaming, Planning, Doing and Celebrating, found in Dragon Dreaming. With so close a connection to the organisation of our brains it is hardly surprising that we find the four steps occurred long before their recognition in the Western Australian Gaia Foundation, from the late 1980s onwards.

In fact, when we examine hunter gatherer lifestyles, that have existed at least for the last 180,000 years with Early Modern Humans, if not since the discovery and use of fire, half a million years ago, we can clearly recognise the existence of the "hearth circles" around which people gathered at night. The pattern of Dreaming occurs mostly in the period of shallow sleeping, just before waking. Planning occurs generally in the early morning, and as hunter gatherers, it was then that the collective decisions for the day's activities, hunting and gathering, would have occurred. This would be followed by the "doing", generally in which men set off to hunt whilst the women and children stay closer to the base camp, gathering fruits and other foodstuffs. In the evening when if successful, the men have returned bringing back what has been caught, then this is generally cooked in the hearth fire and then shared, with the early evening being taken up with story telling, evaluation of the hunt and Celebration, before sleeping once again. It is hardly surprising when we find that this same pattern underlies the human capacity for story telling.

All stories ever told begin with an introduction, in which we are introduced to the characters and their world. Eventually a protagonist emerges, who is seen as having a special role to play. As Joseph Campbell has shown in "Hero of a Thousand Faces", early signs of this character's special role may be given that are at first not recognised by others. The story then moves towards the climax, where the help given to the hero protagonist prepare him (or less frequently "her", remember in patriarchy it is generally the men who told the stories), and after some kind of "quest", the story results in a struggle in which, after considerable sacrifice, the hero returns to heal the wounds caused by the earlier loss of grace, and in the anticlimax of the resolution, the community comes together in a new way not available before.

Campbell showed that such a pattern is not just found in tales like those of King Arthur, but even in the stories of great religious teachers like Muhammed or Jesus Christ. That such a pattern is so widespread suggests that it is a universal way in which we human beings organise "meaning" in our lives, and would be expected from the pattern of brain architecture discussed above.

Thus we find the pattern of Dragon Dreaming, "Dream", "Plan", "Do" and "Celebrate" not only underlies every successful project. It is found in all human cultures, at all periods and is reflected in the way in which the human brain itself is organised. Perhaps, since this pattern of brain organisation is also found in mammals such as chimpanzees, dolphins and elephants, we could conclude that this pattern is part of the evolution of complex life on the planet, and is part of the way in which, for millions of years, life has been engaged in the process of achieving ever greater degrees of self awareness and self control. If this is true, then the pattern may lie at the heart of life itself.