The Secret of Dreaming

An Australian Aboriginal Myth of Creation

Adapted by Rowan Walking Wolf

1| PRESENTATION

This Australian Aboriginal myth of creation is part of a research work in Education Sciences which is being conducted at the University of Granada, Spain.[1] Specifically, it is one of the 336 traditional stories from all around the world selected as educational tools for the transmission of (1) a complex-systems worldview and thinking, and (2) the principles and values of the Earth Charter.

THE DECISIVE IMPORTANCE OF WORLDVIEWS

Since 1972, many studies have been conducted in the fields of Systems Dynamics and Futures Studies which indicate a high probability that, if we do not change our course, our civilisation is heading to a breakdown, or even a total collapse, sometime along this century.[2] These same academics, as well as many others in different fields of knowledge, point to the worldview prevailing in the West —now globalised— as the deepest source of the serious social and environmental problems which can lead us to that situation.[3]

That is why we have formulated a theoretical framework to educate in an alternative —integrative, holistic and ecologic— worldview based on the new scientific paradigm: the complex-systems paradigm. This worldview would be an attempt, from the field of education, to address the problem at its roots.

THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONAL STORIES AND ORAL CULTURES

Within this theoretical framework, we have proposed a first practical approach to a worldview education through the use of traditional stories —myths, legends, folktales, fables, etc.— from all over the planet as educational tools for the transmission of a complex-systems thinking.

Studies confirm that these stories constitute great pedagogical tools to instil this new thinking and way of seeing reality.[4] We have even obtained solid evidence that traditional stories belonging to oral cultures have a higher level of components of the worldview which we need to encourage than those stories belonging to written cultures. This would be pointing to the need to preserve oral traditions as decisive cultural elements for our survival as a species.[5]

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[1] Cutanda (2016); Cutanda, Fernández-Herrería, Brown & Martínez-Rodríguez (2017).

[2] Bardi (2011); Hall & Day (2009); Holling (2001); Homer-Dixon (2006); Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens III (1972); Meadows, Meadows & Randers (1992); Meadows, Randers & Meadows (2004); Turner (2008, 2012).

[3] Bateson (1979, 1987); Boff (2002); Bowers (2010); Capra & Luisi (2014); Gadotti (2002); Hedlund-de Witt (2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014) Morin (1984, 1994); Selby (1999, 2004); Sterling (2003, 2007, 2017); Taylor (2009).

[4] Cutanda & Murga-Menoyo (2014); Cutanda (2016).

[5] Cutanda (2016).

In addition to selecting traditional stories capable of conveying the new worldview and way of thinking, we have grouped the 336 stories under the different principles of an international document which is the first statement of shared ethical principles of our global society: the Earth Charter.

The Earth Charter is a recognised international "soft law" document, like the Declaration of Human Rights. It is a statement of principles and values for humanity in the 21st century. The Earth Charter is the end result of 6 years of intercultural conversations among thousands of people across our planet; people from civil society belonging to all creeds and cultures. It has been endorsed by more than 250 universities around the world and by UNESCO, which suggest to "utilize the Earth Charter as an educational instrument."

2| EDUCATIONAL INSIGHTS ABOUT THIS ABORIGINAL STORY

2.1| With regard to the Earth Charter

This myth of creation would perfectly serve the purpose of illustrating an excerpt of the Preamble of the **Earth Charter;** specifically, the one entitled "**Earth: Our Home,"** which states:

> Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

It is very possible that we will not keep in memory for a long time the arid text of an international document like this. However, it is much more likely that we remember an ancestral story which conveys not only the same ideas but, beyond the cognitive aspects, infuses us with feelings, attitudes and values, as well as the beauty of a life in this way understood.

Among the categories of analysis related to the principles of the Earth Charter, this story offers in parts of its text —or throughout it— the following clusters of values:

- ❒ **Prevalence of common interest.-** The idea that social or ecological common interest takes precedence over personal interest
- ❒ **Appreciation of the interdependence of relationships.-** An explicit or inferred sense of interdependence among humans or between humans and environment
- ❒ **Expanded sense of identity.-** The sense of individual or group identity is blurred and/or expands toward the global
- ❒ **Sense of belonging to the community of life.-** Displaying feelings or a sense of respect, affection, consideration or care to other non-human living beings or non-living elements of nature
- ❒ **Synchronic co-responsibility.-** Establishing values of equity and social justice, fair evaluation of things, awareness of the relationships between local and global reality, and consequences of our actions on the present community of life

❐ **Diachronic co-responsibility.-** Consequences of our actions on the future community of life are established

❐ **Empathy and affectivity.-** Reflecting concerns or feelings of empathy and affection for other human or non-.human beings, or even for non-living nature

❐ **Respect for life and non-violence.-** Attitudes of respect for life and non-violence in the face of conflicts; avoiding damage to any other living being or non-living element of nature

❐ **Critical and active social attitude.-** Displaying critical and active social attitudes before social or environmental problems, and behaviours of participation, cooperation and collaboration within a group

2.2| With regard to a complex-systems worldview

As Professor Stephen Sterling says, "Inseparable from worldview is *thought,* both in the noun sense of 'body of belief, opinion and ideas' and the active sense, as in 'the process of thinking'."[6] To see if this myth fulfilled the appropriate characteristics to convey a complex-systems, holistic and ecological worldview, it was analysed according to the categories of the complex-systems thinking, satisfying them ALL. That is, in this story you can find sections capable of transmitting the following aspects of complex-systems thinking:

- **Systemic and inclusive thinking.-** There are cognitive operations of synthesis, establishing of relationships and interconnections. Parts are contemplated as components of an interrelated and interdependent whole

- **Cognitive, emotional, ethical and aesthetic integration.-** There are elements from at least three types of components articulated, including the following: cognitive, affective, ethical and aesthetic

- **Theoretical and practical coherence.-** There is a close relationship between theory and practice, ideas and actions

- **Dialogic cognitive operations.-** There are dialogical relations, even conciliation, among opposing or antagonistic elements

- **Contextualisation.-** Relations are established either among the requirements of the immediate context, actions and their consequences on the local or global context, or changes in global context evoke actions in the immediate context

- **Quotidianity.-** Everyday experiences are valued

- **Recursive cognitive operations.-** Recursive cognitive operations, reflexiveness, self-criticism and ethical evaluation of characters own actions are inferred

- **Motivation for self-improvement.-** There is an individual search for changes and challenges to meet personal needs or for self-improvement

- **Participation, collaboration, cooperation.-** Characters are involved in decision making or collective action, collaborate and cooperate to achieve a goal

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[6] Sterling (2003, p. 122).

- **Adaptive responses before uncertainty.-** Adaptive affective attitudes and responses to different circumstances and changes, or mechanisms of tolerance for uncertainty and creative responses looking for alternative scenarios are observed
- **Metaphorical-analogical thinking.-** There is a use of metaphors or analogies to illustrate concepts, ideas or attitudes

3| Suggestions for Discussion

A| TRANSCENDING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

It is estimated that, on our planet, there are currently between 3,000 and 5,000 languages, of which only 600 are spoken by over 100,000 people. If we add to this the different conceptual and cultural frameworks, and the differences of thought and understanding of reality, getting to understand each other deeply in a multicultural world can be little more than impossible.

However, we have commonalities which are powerful enough to unite and understand each other. Laughter is one of them. Pain and crying is another one. Fiesta, dance, rituals, jokes... dialogue... We have a wide common ground! Among these precious elements which all mankind share are the STORIES. Stories as cultural seeds in which are compressed countless elements of thought (cognitive), feeling (affective), understanding of the good (ethical) and understanding of the beautiful (aesthetic). Stories as access roads to cultural ways of seeing and understanding the world.

Beyond words and languages are images and imagination evoked by a story. There are the way of feeling of another people, what they value, what they consider beautiful, what they consider interesting, captivating, exciting...

- **Could we talk about traditional stories as simple "high technology cultural cartouches" designed by the first sages of humanity as means for communication and transmission of understandings of reality and the world?**
- **Could we use these "cartouches" to establish a deep dialogue between cultures? Would they allow us to go beyond where words come through languages?**
- **Has your vision of Australian Aboriginal culture changed in any way after watching *The Secret of Dreaming?***

B| LEARNING TO THINK IN A DIFFERENT WAY

Cultures, as daughters of a landscape, of a climate and a natural environment populated by other beings, generate their own ways of understanding the world, relating to it... and thinking about it. And the stories of a culture are a condensed form of that way of *being in the world.*

This being so,

- **Could the stories from environmentally friendly cultures, which have lived for centuries in harmony with their natural environment, teach us to think and be in the world in a way less harmful to our planetary community of life?**

- **Do you think it's possible, through stories like *The Secret of Dreaming,* to rethink our anthropocentric worldview, or even adopt an ecocentric worldview, as advocated by Aldo Leopold?[7]**
- **With stories sucha as *The Secret of Dreaming,* do you think that we could gradually change the way we think about the world around us, and the way we are on it?**

C| DISCOVERING THE EARTH CHARTER

The Earth Charter was created by a global consultation process involving thousands of people from all around the world. In this sense, it is the most inclusive international document ever made, not only because of the multiplicity of cultures, religions and nations involved in its elaboration, but also because of the diversity of social backgrounds of the people who inspired and drafted its text.

The Earth Charter is a framework of ethical principles which not only deals with environmental issues, but also with social and economic justice, democracy, non-violence and peace. It has been endorsed by organisations representing millions of people, seeking "to inspire in all peoples a sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family, the greater community of life, and future generations".[8]

Why is not the Earth Charter so well known as the Declaration of Human Rights? Because, although the Charter was created at the urging of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, some of the most powerful nations gathered at the UN General Assembly did not want to endorse the final text because of their own economic and power interests. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights taught them not to accept again an ethical framework which could call into question their behaviours.

After this, Maurice Strong (Chairman of the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992) and Mikhail Gorbachev, restarted the Earth Charter as a **civil society initiative** in 1994, with the help of the government of Netherlands. The drafting of the text was done during a six-year worldwide consultation process, until it was approved at a meeting of the Earth Charter Commission at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in March 2000. The official launch was on 29th June 2000 in a ceremony at The Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands attended the ceremony.

Nowadays, the United Nations still does not endorse the Charter, although its specialised agency on education, science and culture, UNESCO, has recognised it and recommended to all nations as an educational tool.

- **Do you think that stories like *The Secret of Dreaming* can help spread the Earth Charter?**
- **Do you think that a civil society initiative such as the Earth Charter has any option against political and economic powers which violate its principles and, therefore, refuse to endorse it?**
- **Could the simple act of telling stories which illustrates the different passages of the Earth Charter be understood as social and environmental activism?**

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[7] Leopold (1949) proposed an ecocentric worldview, which contemplates the terrestrial *community of life* as a whole, giving to the rest of species and nature an intrinsic value.

[8] Earth Charter Initiative: What is the Earth Charter? See: http://earthcharter.org/discover/what-is-the-earth-charter/.

You can download the text of the Earth Charter in any of 59 languages here:
http://earthcharter.org/virtual-library2/the-earth-charter-text/

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