



LAKESIDE CONVERSATION

September 17, 2009 - Lienden, NL

*And so, driven on ceaselessly toward
new shores, carried beyond return into eternal
darkness, shall we never cast anchor for a
single day in the ocean of time?*

Alphonse de Lamartine: *Le Lac* (1820)



Participants in the conversation:

- Marten DeVries - University of Maastricht
- Chide Groenouwe - Free University Amsterdam
- Francio Guadeloupe - Radboud University (absent due to unforeseen circumstances)
- Ekko van Ierland - University of Wageningen
- George Miley - University of Leiden (absent due to unforeseen circumstances)
- Jaap Swart - Mind Venture International
- Jan Visser - Learning Development Institute
- Lya Visser - George Washington University

Prompt to discussion

Jan Visser

I have an interest in discussing issues in the realm of Learning for Sustainable Futures.

My interest in these issues is more related to *how* we learn than to *what* we learn. This leads to several questions.

1. What kind of human individuals and social entities do we want to see emerge as a result from the lifelong process of learning we all engage in? What does this mean in terms of, dispositions such individuals and social entities should possess in addition to what they may know and can do. (Note that in this question I don't restrict 'learning' to the domain of individuals, but explicitly recognize the learning engaged in by social entities at different levels of complexity.)
2. What do we mean by 'learning'? Most people take the notion for granted, having some vague idea of what it means. Professionals in the world of education and training may have specific definitions that suit their particular trade. My own definition is given in a footnote below.¹
3. In that context I wish to know what it is in the learning landscape that ensures that such individuals and social entities function in ways that lead to harmonious cohabitation with our environment and peaceful coexistence among the members of our species.
4. The 'learning landscape' referred to above consists of a large variety of spatial-temporal settings in which we learn, some of them formal and structured, but most of them informal and not necessarily structured. We may want to identify the most important ones among those 'learning spaces' and think of responses to the above three questions in relation to specific learning spaces we have in mind.

I believe the above issues to represent particularly acute concerns. Recently the acuteness of these concerns became even more prominent in my mind as I listened to the three-part series about *Climate Wars* featured in Paul Kennedy's 'Ideas' program on CBC Radio. The audio files of that series, and links to documentation supporting the programs, are available at <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/features/climate-wars/index.html>.

¹ I have habituated myself to thinking of **human learning** as "**the disposition of human beings, and of the social entities to which they pertain, to engage in continuous dialogue with the human, social, biological and physical environment, so as to generate intelligent behavior to interact constructively with change.**" The rationale underlying this definition can be found in the chapter on *Integrity, completeness and comprehensiveness of the learning environment: Meeting the basic learning needs of all throughout life* that I contributed to the [International Handbook on Lifelong Learning](#), edited by D. N. Aspin, J. D. Chapman, M. J. Hatton, & Y. Sawano and published in 2001 by Kluwer Academic Publishers (now Springer). Subsequent publications as well as the work by others in this area have deepened my insight into human learning as an ecological phenomenon.