
**World's Fearlessness Teachings:
Radical Approach to Fear Management/Education**



R. Michael Fisher, Ph.D.
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Technical Paper No. 35

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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First Edition 2010

Cover and layout by R. Michael Fisher
ISOF Logo (original 1989) designed by RMF

Printed in USA

The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

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Abstract: The author outlines a unique transdisciplinary method for studying fear and fearlessness, with emphasis on a new conceptualization “World’s Fearlessness Teachings” (i.e., Fearlessness Tradition) and their critical importance, across time and cultures, to better manage and teach fear management in the 21st century. Extracts from the author’s new book *“The World’s Fearlessness Teachings: A Critical Integral Approach to Fear Management/Education for the 21st Century”* (University Press of America, 2010) are included. The paper concludes that “experts” in the area of fear management/education are generally unwilling to try a transdisciplinary approach because it is more work and less pragmatic. The author admits his methodology is radical, while grounded in an evolutionary realism-idealism model, and few “experts” in fear management are interested in it, so far. The field of Education ought to lead this (r)evolutionary approach and utilize the resource of the World’s Fearlessness Teachings to do so.

INTRODUCTION

The New Future Institutions of Education

Does the world need us to be fearless? - Wheatley¹

The future belongs to the institutions that both recognize and creates a market for a new boundaryless, fearless pedagogy, clearly distinct from the process of evaluating and giving credentials.” – O’Donnell²

I would like my work on fearlessness to influence leadership and the design and practices of institutions of education (K to post-secondary); including, socialization in general. I’m not holding my breath. However, it is inspiring to see scholars like O’Donnell (and there are others) who see that a “fearless” pedagogical approach is going to be the leading-edge for future education, if the world is to be at all sustainable and healthy. Implied in O’Donnell’s quote is the critical analysis that most of our institutions (especially in Education) are fear-based and becoming not the solu-

¹ Wheatley, M. Eight fearless questions. Excerpt from “A Call to Fearlessness for Gentle Leaders.” Address at the Shambhala Institute Core Program, Halifax, NS, June 2006. Published in *Fieldnotes*, September/October (2006), The Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership. Retrieved June 8, 2007 from <http://www.shambhalainstitute.org/contact.html>

² O’Donnell, J. J. (1998). *Avatars of the word: From papyrus to cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. p. 189.

tions to societal and global problems but an additional cause. I won't go into that longer argument here.

Unfortunately, how to exactly define "fearless" is problematic, as my research for 21 years has shown. The word is used a lot (mostly in populist rhetoric³) and less so is "fearlessness"—but what they mean to different people, with different agendas, is often contradictory if not confusing. My big project, as an educator, and fearologist, attempts to sort that all out.

A Transdisciplinary Approach With Integral Theory

In this short technical paper there will be lots left out of how I attempt to sort that all out. This is a primary introduction only. It focuses on my **methodology** and reveals a few bits of the findings. I recommend folks interested would need to read my other publications or chat with me to get 'filled-in' on details and finer subtleties of this radical critical (if not (r)evolutionary) theoretical work.

I would like my new term "World's Fearlessness Teachings" (i.e., Fearlessness Tradition) to be an integral notion, approach, and reality that aids us all to better manage fear holistically and developmentally on this planet. In prior publications⁴ (and previous technical papers) I have outlined *The Fear Problem* facing humanity and what I think we ought to do about it. It has been very difficult, virtually impossible in my experience, to get a diverse but unified group of thinkers together to work on this problem. On that note, as an alternative I have pursued a unifying (if not iconoclastic and 'weird') theory as a first step.

In my new book *The World's Fearlessness Teachings*⁵ I construct a transdisciplinary and evolutionary integral theory to better understand our relationship with fear and fearlessness (which includes a postmodern deconstructive-reconstructive approach to 'fear' and 'fearlessness' as yet undefinable).⁶ I focus on fearlessness as a conceptualization and process, of which I offer the following definition (meaning):

fearlessness spontaneously emerges as an evolutionary impulse of Defense that derives from, but beyond, the emergence of fear....

³ A quick search on Google will see a commodified "fearless" discourse attached as a branding to many kinds of contemporary extreme merchandise and lifestyles (e.g., "fearless cooking"). I am interested in this popular trend as a symptom of an underlying problem in our societies, but my focus is on the more political, cultural, spiritual, and liberational discourses of "fearless."

⁴ For an up-to-date listing of these go to <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19587857/R-Michael-Fisher-Tech-Papers-134-Fearanalysis->. For a copy of some of these publications and others go to my website <http://www.feareducation.com> and/or to Google Scholar and/or ERIC documents on the Internet. Also contact me directly: rmichaelfisher@gmail.com

⁵ Fisher, R. M. (2010). *The world's fearlessness teachings: A critical integral approach to fear management/education for the 21st century*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. See Appendix 1 for an outline of the book contents.

⁶ I use Spiral Dynamics Theory and Ken Wilber's Integral Theory to assist this understanding. See the Internet and/or my earlier publications and/or my new book Fisher (2010).

I shape this notion of “fearlessness” impulse, if you will, as one of many definitions or meanings (I have 15 or so in the book). I craft it spontaneously. It has unique features above that I have not added or written in this way before. However, it has repetitive and thematic elements as well. This is the foundational premise, based in evolutionary theory, and applicable to all living things, that my work (and new book) revolves around. I clarify in my new book (Fisher, 2010) that,

*... a major evolutionary principle or law of the universe seems to be: **when fear arises, there will be fearlessness** (i.e., fearlessness in one of its many forms, ‘courage’ being just one of seven). Yet, such a natural impulse to manage fear is not the only thing constructing our knowledge of how to manage fear. From my postmodern perspective, I believe cultural aspects (values, beliefs, worldviews) and developmental aspects (level of maturity), with their concomitant politics, are the more important in determining our relationship to fear and various culturally modified forms of ‘fear.’ Thus, a transdisciplinary critical holistic-integral approach needs to be cultivated today to understand the rich complexity of fear and fearlessness. (p. xxviii)*

Of the complex discussion that could derive from this quote alone, I’ll by-pass that labyrinth and suggest that a few crucial points are worth noting before I go on to describe the methodology of my research approach as the focus of this technical paper.

First, the term “**maturity**” is pivotal in integral theory and my work. It means that “fearlessness” (or technically, what I also have called the “spirit of fearlessness”) is interpretable along a gradient of maturity, or spectrum of consciousness, or hierarchical schema of v-memes (value systems). Keeping this simple for introduction purposes, let me skip all those terms and say “maturity” is a key feature. And the determination of maturity is obviously subjective to some large degree, but it is also somewhat objective in using the theories and integral approach that I do. I mark out the spectrum of maturity (developmentally) by which first there is *non-fear*, then *bravery* (with *bravado* as the more “twisted” form of bravery), then *courage*, then *fear-less*, then *fearlessness*, then *fearless*. Thus, seven forms of maturity (some call levels or stages) by which the spirit of fearlessness manifests in human evolution.

Second, the quote from my text above refers to the “**rich complexity** of fear and fearlessness.” Note that I am a postmodern researcher and theorist on this topic. That such a view requires a multi-perspective view (e.g., transdisciplinary as well).⁷ What this means which is most important if one is to understand and respect my work is that *you have to come to the topic of fearlessness with an open-mind*. If you come to the topic, believing you pretty much know all there is to know about fear and fearlessness (i.e., fear management/education), well, then you are going to get nothing but frustration out of my writing and teachings. A postmodern perspective tends to start the inquiry into any topic with an open-mind (deconstructionist attitude) that what we think we know about a topic is already highly biased and

⁷ Technically, the integral approach is based on *aperspectival* consciousness (J. Gebser) or what developmental researchers might call postconventional (or post-postconventional) cognition.

skewed (with partial truths, but with distortions). The argument for that assumption of postmodernist approaches is philosophical and beyond the scope of this paper to rationalize or justify; I explain it, from an integral (Wilberian) perspective, in my other publications (my new book).

Postmodern is the era from roughly 1950-60s onward, with roots traceable to Nietzsche's critiques of Western metaphysics. Postmodern, as complex and controversial as it is to define, really suggests that Modern and Premodern approaches (knowledges) are limited (less mature) and they often (even characteristically) lack the self-critical awareness of their limitations. That 'blind spot,' that immature partiality, is what Postmodernity is attempting, more or less, to correct (or, at least, point out).⁸ You can see, my approach is one of a critique—a massive critique of our knowledges of fear and fearlessness. Again, if that is not what you want to be studying or not what makes you curious to investigate, then you will be very frustrated by my work. I don't write "self-help" manuals on how to overcome "fear(s)."

Integral Methodology: A Critical Analysis of Fearlessness

World's Fearlessness Teachings: Defined

In a unique process and method throughout my research, I found it is useful to follow the premise *when fear arises, there also will be fearlessness*, with a definition of World's Fearlessness Teaching(s):

World's Fearlessness Teachings- any teaching, East or West, North or South, sacred or secular, oral or written, published or unpublished, immature or mature, which attempts to manage fear better, is a valid expression of the spirit of fearlessness and its role in the emancipation of human consciousness and society. (p. 91)

This definition is all-encompassing, and some might think it is too all-encompassing to be of any value. I think it is of value, first and foremost, in that it *validates* expression(s) of all the ways an individual, group, community, organization, culture, or civilization attempts to manage fear. Fear management is going on all the time. Are they all managing fear? Yes. More or less, consciously or unconsciously, they are coping with fear, healing fear, transforming fear—all of those are types of fear management. At least, that's the case I present and argue in my book at length. It is "natural" to manage fear and the spirit of fearlessness is the means by which all fear management begins.

Fearlessness, then, in this foundational integral philosophy, is fear management enacted. Fearlessness itself, as a spirit of Defense, is healthy and built into evolution to respond to fear (and thus, risk, danger, threat). *Fearlessness is not the*

⁸ I realize this is not exactly what all "postmodern" philosophers might argue, and they would prefer to stay away from terms like "mature" or "less mature" etc. They would argue all knowledges are partial and incomplete, if not entirely relativistic. Integral theory (a la Wilber) embraces much of this postmodern view but transcends its limitations (thus, it has been called post-postmodern by some).

problem humans have. If there is a screw up or pathology, it is in the *interpretation* of fearlessness and how it is enacted from that interpretation.⁹ Albeit, there are more or less mature, immature, good, or not so good, ways to manage fear (and thus, similarly with fearlessness forms like bravery, courage, fearless etc.). The planet has them all, and each person has many of those ways embedded in their own system of fear management— embedded as discourses¹⁰ of fear management (or what I technically label Fear Management Systems).¹¹

My Basic Methodology

It is impossible in a short space of a technical paper to outline and describe the details of my entire methodology in the study of fear ('fear') and fearlessness ('fearlessness') since 1989; albeit, informally I was studying fear and fearlessness since my conception. Yes, it is inherent in a living intelligent organism to figure out ("study") the ins and outs of the interrelationships of fear and fearlessness, because they are arguably, two of the most powerful motivational forces on the planet.¹² Because of fearism, taught

⁹ Readers may note that this is a similar idea to "God" in some theologies or "Brahman" or "Absolute"—where the problem is the level of interpretation of "God" not "God" itself (or Himself or Herself). The nuance in my work is developmental, which allows for validating the differences of views and ways of fearlessness, but also allows a full-spectrum of possibilities for everyone to enact, depending on conditions. Fear ('fear' as I prefer it), is another baby—another story—another book (to come). Fear has been greatly, if not totally, distorted throughout human cultural history (i.e., The Fear Problem, or The 'Fear' Matrix as I like to call it). See my earlier publications. My latest book moves this philosophical shifting from all the writing of late that attempts to say "fear is a gift" and I challenge that in the book and say no, that is mistaken identity, rather it is "fearlessness is a gift." And for those who are intent on making "fear" natural (without taking in the full conceptual and real implications of 'fear' as a patterning), I will disagree with them. Then some will try to say but "spirit of fearlessness" is only good because it depends on "fear" first. Without fear existing there wouldn't be fearlessness. This is way too simplistic logic, for the complexity of the whole life system I am attempting to theorize. I don't have time here to go into the ontology of my argument for fearlessness in an evolutionary and philosophical (ethical) sense. I claim "fear" is not natural, "alertness" (flight-fight-freeze-befriend) is natural and they are all forms of fearlessness just like bravery, courage, etc. though the flight-fight-freeze-befriend is a very reductionistic explanation of fearlessness based on behaviors of responses to "fear"—which is all again, problematic language from biopsychology (and not a transdisciplinary perspective).

¹⁰ Technically, I follow a critical discourse analysis based on Michel Foucault's work here.

¹¹ A good deal of my later work is on Fear Management Systems (FMSs). The FMSs are closely linked to the levels, altitudes of Spiral Dynamics Theory of v-memes (and Wilber's work).

¹² Readers may notice that this philosophy and theory is based on *Love vs. fear*, as found in many premodern and modern texts, across wisdom traditions, sacred and secular (e.g., it is found in the Bible, in the Gita, etc.). Love, as I am using it here is the spirit of fearlessness and/or visa versa, depending on how you craft the ontological argument. This might merely be a faith claim, but I think not. I prefer *fearlessness* as a construct and reality for Love, for

systemically by our cultures, most of us have not well “studied” fear and fearlessness, and mostly we have abandoned the ongoing research into these phenomenon and their knowledges. That’s because a good *fear education* (analogous to say good “sex education”) has been discouraged (by ‘fear’ itself). Mostly, we assume we’ve discovered most of what we already need to know; and thus, in fear of knowing all about fear (‘fear’) we tend to assume, and lack the full curiosity to inquiry ongoing. The same I have learned with fearlessness (to an even greater extent, especially in the West). We in North America especially are highly pragmatic¹³ in our fear education generally. I’ll leave that argument alone here, see my other publications where I discuss the epistemological and ethical problematic of studying and knowing fear (‘fear’) and fearlessness (‘fearlessness’).

Formally, in 1989, with the declaration of my mystical experience into a form or project, I began searching for all the knowledge I could gather, from all the sources I could tap, to figure out what is known about fear (‘fear’) and what is known about fearlessness (‘fearlessness’) and their interrelationship to me, to others, and to the planetary systems, if you will. Big project, called “In Search of Fearlessness Project.”¹⁴ The simplest part of the methodology was to respect *all* knowledges (i.e., the integral method). And thus, to *validate* that whatever is thought, said, written down, etc. about fear management. It is there for a reason. It must be partially useful in some way. Albeit, I suspected always, some knowledges (“teachings”) were better than others—some better for certain conditions and occasions, some better overall for liberation, some better for oppressing people.

many reasons, not the least of which is that “Love” has been way over romanticized and distorted for millenium (well, at least, for centuries).

¹³ I mean pragmatism as an operative philosophy (practice) is predominant in North America, and especially in America. I am much much a realist-idealist in my thinking and am interested in “what works” (as is pragmatism) but I am interested in critiquing “what works” because what works for some doesn’t work for others and those differences need to be investigated but more so my idealist part looks to what humans are ideally capable of—that is, “fearless.” Pragmatism lacks that bigger developmental or evolutionary picture of human potential, at least that’s my critique at this time and I don’t claim to be an expert or philosopher who can argue this. It is more my observation as an ‘amateur philosopher.’

¹⁴ This Project was a counter to The ‘Fear’ Project I saw as consuming and undermining the sustainability of healthy human life and our ecosystems. I used the term of the Project as well, as a spin-off from the 1980s “In Search of Excellence” movement that came in the business and organizational development literature (e.g. Tom Peters et al.). My version was to include but transcend “excellence” and in a more ideal way, and take this initiative of quality improvement to “fearlessness” (a gesture seen in the last few years by Margaret Wheatley, an internationally recognized organizational consultant, for e.g., see Kleiner, A. (2007) (interview with Margaret Wheatley). *Fearlessness: The last organizational change strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.strategy-business.com/li/leadingideas/li00044?pg=1>).

It was and still is highly complex using a methodology, like I do. I knew immediately once I started recording the discourses (knowledges) on fear and fearlessness there was *not* going to be *one* definitive “definition” or one right and true “meaning” for these phenomenon. fear and fearlessness cannot be boxed-in and categorized so neatly. That brought me into the postmodern world of emergent complexity and multiple perspectives on reality. It was somewhat disturbing as my premodern and modern self wanted to “get clear” fixed definition(s). I think, now in retrospect, it was my fear-based self that wanted that clarity and that fixed.¹⁵

My search into fear management was transdisciplinary (and integral), that is, it included popular culture (what was media saying about fear and fearlessness)? What was my neighbor saying? What were my university professors and fellow students saying? What were they writing down and how were they writing it down?¹⁶ *Everyone is doing fear management and thus, they are all doing fear education.* Eventually, much later I came up with the notion of FME (fear management/education) as the domain of teaching that is going on. I searched libraries of my friends, colleagues, and of college and university campuses and cities. I searched data bases and the Internet (and still do).

One of my favorite approaches to research what is published on fear and fearlessness is to go to the university libraries and walk down the aisles and grab off every book on the shelves, until I’m dead beat tired. Pulling a book off the shelf and then looking at the Table of Contents, and mostly at the Index. Is “fear” or “fearlessness” (or “fearless”) listed. I would copy quotes and references when I found something. But note, my methodology from the start was not to collect specifically information (knowledges, or discourses) on “fear(s)” —that is, on phobias, or fear of x, y, z. I found that all too tedious, boring, repetitive, and intuitively thought it would lead to not much of anything very deep or very broad—and certainly, it would not lead

¹⁵ I often argue that the greatest fear of humans (at least in the last few millenium) is likely the fear that they don’t really know what fear is. Now, that’s disturbing—as it raises the issue of “why not?” What forces (elites?) have been educating us to not know what fear is, or what fearlessness is—at least, the mainstream of “us.” Questions of doubt have always entered my methodology. If fear and fearlessness are as powerful as they seem, then control of that power is inevitable. I often refer to this problematic as *sublte fearism* (like terrorism but more insidious and invisible).

¹⁶ One of the characteristic things I noticed, almost invariably across disciplines and in popular literatures as well, is that everyone writes about fear and fearlessness as if they have the final truth on it. Like all there is now is, to apply what we know. The field of FME is disastrously closed down from continuous open inquiry (the only exception is the neurobiology of fear literature, which still practices good science and thus ongoing testing and revising of what is know of the fear pathways; however, this neurobiology of fear is highly reductionistic). Equally characteristic, was each writer tending to stay in their own domain and discipline and expertise, and little depth and breadth of synethsizing goes on.

to anything very 'new' or 'fresh' and useful (speaking critically and from an emancipatory lens). Phobias, for example, was all a literature on fear(s) as defined by Psychology (and Biology, Physiology, Medicine). Self-help books were also of this same format—lacking depth and breadth—lacking criticality. I didn't want that one discipline of Psychology (Medical Sciences and Behavioral Sciences) and its discourses on fear and fearlessness ruling my transdisciplinary investigation.¹⁷

Transdisciplinarity took me to many different book shelves in the libraries, as you can imagine. I was more fascinated how anthropology, ethnology, ethology, communications, law, arts, theology, business, education, philosophy, sociology, criminology, religion, spirituality, etc. were talking about fear and fearlessness. I would have to find elaborate means of filing these in my own Fear Library. Yet, I realized I was merely recording the World's Fear Library. Yes, I was sampling a total library of knowledges about fear management. What had been published, especially in the university libraries, most intrigued me because it has passed a long road of editing and elite pathways of power of what kind of knowledge gets into a university library. Thus, these are powerful knowledges in such libraries in terms of their status anyway; that seemed a reasonable assumption.¹⁸ It also seemed reasonable that those who were writing and publishing and purchasing such knowledges much have a lot of vested interest in what is said about fear and fearlessness. Yes. I still think this is a reasonable assumption.

I found lots on fear, less on fearlessness, and even less on fearless at the time of my library shelf-scanning days (1990s and early 2000s). I found the discourses varied greatly, but with some general agreements (perhaps). But that is not what I am going to go into here; again, read my book and other publications and a future volume I want to write on *The World's Fear Teachings*. In this technical paper I am showing you how I arrived at a notion of the World's Fear Library—and thus when I took out all the quotes I had collected all those years on "fearlessness" (and "without fear" and "freedom from fear" etc.), I ended up with binders full of knowledge about fearlessness—and I could see that one could not talk about fear management without talking about bravery, courage as well. Though, the latter were not a major part of my collecting quotes. In fact, I found what was

¹⁷ I often write about Psychologism and its negative impacts on "shaping" our human knowledge about human fear and fearlessness; which doesn't mean I ignore Psychology and its related more "scientific" ways of knowing fear ('fear'), etc. Mind you, I did notice early in my research in psychology books that most everyone thought "fearlessness" was a pathology (at least in the West). Eastern spiritual books were saying the opposite!

¹⁸ Arguably, more populist libraries and literatures and discourses in the media and on the Internet may now be more "powerful" in that they are used more by more people, than knowledge in academic libraries.

written about them as rather banal and obvious in most cases. My focus of collecting, with all its problems of bias, was general discussions of *fear it-self* and *fearlessness* (fearless). You can imagine that restricting my data collection to these latter terms was logistical as well, as there was so much I had to manage as information alone. Then, one has to collate it and make sense of it. Quite a nightmare at times. Bottomline, because I was doing all this research on my own (minimal) funds and time, without research assistants, I had to limit the searching. A good deal of the data was collected in my five years in graduate school (1998-2003) but lots was collected before that.

You can likely also imagine the problem of keeping up with all the quotes that come out daily in all the publications and talking going on on the planet. It is impossible to keep up with the fearlessness literature (i.e., the World's Fearlessness Teachings). However, at some point, some years ago, I don't know exactly when it happened, but it happened, and I realized that I was no longer collecting anything really "new" (or "original" or "fresh") on fear and fearlessness. I hit a limit and saturation to the research. This has largely continued to be the case—not much new appears. That's when I knew my research was over in terms of the base collection—after that, the research I do is finding patterns in the baseline of the data collected. I find this activity exhilarating. Mostly, I like using and shaping theories and critiquing others' theories of fear and fearlessness. The *critical integral theory* of Wilber has been wonderful in giving me a rich source for that shaping and critiquing.¹⁹

Was the data only secondary sources from "quotes"? Mostly, but also lots of my own journaling everyday, my own inquiring via my own experiences and then with groups I was part of. I also interviewed people. That's a long story of primary data sources. The two sources are what I continue to write in and around. They are wonderfully rich and ongoing—ever evolving, just as fear and fearlessness continue to evolve (as does 'fear' and 'fearlessness'). I've attempted through my methodological inquiry into FME to keep the field open and evolving not fear-based and rigid, reductionistic and propagandist (as I see it often is).

¹⁹ What I learned early on in my critiquing of how others wrote and spoke about FME, based on their limited and reductionistic (i.e., unholistic and non-integral) approaches to the topic, was they "hated" being critiqued. I say this with decades of experience and I don't think it is because my critiques are attacking and personal. I say this because they have been the "experts" on fear and fearlessness for so long, and uncontestedly so. There is a gruesome, and harmful, lack of good critical theory applied to FME (and the "experts"). This resistance is a huge factor in holding back the advance of improving FME—and implementing a better fear education and better understanding of fearlessness (i.e., "The World's Fearlessness Teachings"). Unfortunately, Wilber and "integralists" also are not interested.

Difficulty With Adopting My Methodology

My research shows that no one else is doing the kind of research on fear ('fear') and fearlessness ('fearlessness') that I have done. They haven't adopted such a holistic-integral and transdisciplinary approach. They have chosen more mainstream and traditional approaches, which are largely, in my view out-of-date. I look forward to others adopting some of my methodology so that we can as a field of 'Fear' Studies, critically examine our work and findings. What would another person, with similar methodology as mine find? What would be the same, and what might be different. That would be very exciting knowledge to know.

In conclusion, I admit my methodological and philosophical orientation is radical (realist-idealist model). It is emancipatory and liberational. That's the critical theory perspective and pedagogy that I work from and think is most required. Most fear management/education "experts" are not interested in all the extra work of a transdisciplinary approach. The latter is not pragmatic, and likely harder to "market." They prefer, in general, less critical self-reflective practice, where they constantly critique their own knowledge-based in regard to fear and fearlessness. The opportunity for change is available with the publication of *The World's Fearlessness Teachings* (and exposing the Fearlessness Tradition). Time will tell if this will have a wider appeal than it has for the last 21 years.

The field of Education ought to lead this (r)evolutionary approach and utilize the new synthesis and resource of the World's Fearlessness Teachings to do so.

Appendix I

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 (author R. Michael Fisher, published by University Press of America, 2010)

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