

# The Next Evolutionary Step (NESt) Initiative

## Project Proposal

Albert Schweitzer (1875 - 1965), theologian, philosopher, organist & doctor, built his world-view on the ethic of Reverence for Life - a philosophy based around this premise:

*We should stand in awe of nature and treat all that lives, including ourselves, with compassionate respect*

This proposal is made on behalf of Reverence for Life UK, a charity dedicated to sharing and promoting the life and work of Albert Schweitzer. Primarily, the charity works to encourage public discourse and debate in the area of ethics and moral philosophy by studying the work of Albert Schweitzer as the 'lens' through which contemporary global issues and many of the dichotomies of modern life may be discussed. It is the intention that such study, consideration and debate should lead to both individual and collective decision making and action across all faiths and cultures.

Our proposal is to develop a new on-line learning resource, targeted primarily at the post 16 curriculum. This will link to the A and AS Level RE syllabus, 'Life Skills' and beyond and will encourage creative responses to the global challenges we face. It will be embedded within the curriculum but will also serve to foster and support the wider learning, awareness and development of students. It will be launched and trialled initially within the Eastern region.

The Next Evolutionary Step (NESt) initiative will reach new audiences by promoting creative ways of applying the 'Reverence for Life' philosophy in the challenging circumstances of our individual and collective lives now, and for the benefit of future generations. It will act as a catalyst, encouraging students to respond to the issues raised in innovative ways, for example through plays, films, song-cycles, any form of art-work, dissertations, research programmes or social- and community / aid projects. Such creative responses may be by individuals or groups of students working together.

The NESt initiative is the first such project ever undertaken by Reverence for Life UK.

Initial consultations within the post 16 learning sector have proven hugely positive. They have shown the following topic areas as ones that could be explored as part of the new learning resource, through a consideration of the 'Reverence for Life' philosophy as developed not only by Schweitzer but also by many cultures across the world over thousands of years.

How an understanding of the philosophy of 'Reverence for Life' can help to:

- Achieve an economy which cares for earth's long-term well-being when:
- *Less consumption means more unemployment?*

- Banks create money as interest-bearing debt which can only be sustained by growth?
- Western affluence is the predominant aspiration of developing nations?
- Production-consumption-waste systems presume infinite earth resources?
- Luxuries, once established as the norm, are soon regarded as essentials?

Other topic areas (and dichotomies) to be explored through the resource will include:

- Achieving equity between rich and poor societies
- Adopting healthy food policies, eating habits and work environments
- Finding a compassionate attitude to population and migration issues
- Encouraging peaceful conflict resolution upholding international law
- Ensuring proper values and husbandry are applied to earth's resources
- Expecting ethical behaviour as the norm in public life
- Fostering awareness of the mystery of life and of our true place in the world

Consideration, debate and creative responses to such issues will enable students to develop their thinking towards the next evolutionary step that humankind must take in order to resolve them. Such a 'step' may be placed in the context of those taken previously, which could include:

- Speech & writing
- Agriculture
- The abolition of slavery

And more recent moves towards:

- Gender equality
- United Nations
- Earth Charter
- Human Rights
- Rights of the Child
- Animal Rights

In order to equip students with the 'tools' to tackle such issues, the learning resource will place Schweitzer within his wider context - tracking the development of the reverence for life philosophy from its origins within native peoples around the world to its more modern expressions through the work of charities and campaigning groups today. A measure of how widely the philosophy is now accepted is the reference to it by the Bishop of London in his address at Westminster Abbey for the marriage of Prince William and Catherine Middleton:

*"We shall not be converted to the promise of the future by more knowledge, but rather by an increase of loving wisdom and reverence, for life, for the earth and for one another"*

The NES<sup>t</sup> initiative will therefore:

- Provide support to and resources for the formal learning sector and in particular the post 16 age group by using the 'Reverence for Life' as a vehicle to focus on philosophy, ethics and morals and encourage interfaith and intercultural dialogue
- Consult and then work together with schools and colleges within the Eastern region

- *Make the resource suitably flexible in order that it may also be accessible to and supportive of other learning initiatives - such as the 'Gifted and Talented' programme at GCSE level*
- *Recognise that such support and resources will take the form of an education pack to be created on and downloadable from the existing RFL website*
- *Promote the resource as widely as possible through new and existing networks and partnerships*

Saul Penfold MA PGCE