

# **Making and Mistaking Reality:**

## **What is Emotional Education?**

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### **Abstract:**

A central thesis of this paper is that the mind and its thought evolves out of the experience of the whole person in their unique surroundings. It attempts to articulate the meaning and value of emotional education., especially in its relation to thought processes. It shows the value of learning from the particular, and from awareness of feeling states. It shows how making emotional enquiry turns attention towards the *nature of the thinking*, rather than what is being thought, and involves *experiencing while not-knowing* rather than seeking knowledge of the experience or rational explanation.

Recent affirmations from neuroscience of the psychoanalytic picture of conscious awareness arising from unconscious emotional processes is noted. Systemic and emotional thought processes are described and illustrated.

While the nature of unconscious choice is recognised as part of all thought process, the "use of self" is explored as a *conscious* means of influencing the nature of thinking, and the attributes of both person and context necessary to flourishing thought are contrasted with the human needs which produce mistaken thought. Some questions which have been asked by students in emotional education classes, about free will, abuse and ethics are raised. I hope the gratitude to people who have shared their feelings in order to think and be thought about in 'emotional thinking' is evident; it is very real to me.

## 1. Emotional thought

A central thesis of this paper is that the mind and thought evolves out of the experience of the whole person in its unique surroundings. First in the womb with input from the body and world of the mother, later as a dependent infant with caretakers, then interdependent, the person is both receiver and active agent, physically, emotionally and spiritually. When awareness, cognition and conceptual thinking arise, they also contribute to the complexity of experience, but they are not prior, nor more important, nor more influential than the other aspects of the whole. Within this complex evolution, I am trying to work towards articulating the meaning and value of emotional education. Emotional education happens existentially, well or badly, but 'thinking emotionally' is frequently ignored or treated with suspicion.

I also want to show that this involves a valuing of learning from the particular, especially from individuals in their communities of relationships, including their relationships with theory and thought, whatever that may be.

To begin with, to accord value to unique identity, if we look at a picture of a mother and baby, we can ask a number of questions, without seeking answers, to identify the ways in which responses can be similar in principle but uniquely different in particulars. Some questions are:

*Does a new baby have a self ?*

*Or, does it develop a self gradually after birth?*

*What does 'having a self' involve?*

*Is the new baby aware of itself?*

*Is the new baby aware of its mother/caregiver?*

*Is awareness of self/other about separate objects or a sort of combined experience?*

*What is she (which she?) aware of?*

*also, "When you saw the picture, did you first see mother, or baby, or both?"*



Whatever each reader or listener answers, the effect intended is to engage with more than words, and more than reason. The picture and questions establish connection with, and awareness of, a wider range of responses: emotions, feelings, images, sights, sounds, smells; all can be evoked.

In most of the last century the in-depth study of emotion and attempts to identify the processes involved happened within psychoanalytic work, but more recently neuroscience has also explored the physical organ of the brain and emotion. Solms and Turnbull (2002 p. 273) say that the mind is knowable (though certainly not yet known) in two different ways, as experienced by itself as subject, and as a physical organ, an object viewed from outside. They go on to say (pp 296,7):

*Feelings cannot be seen, but they most certainly exist. they are part of nature...They exist. They have effects. And for that reason, science ignores them at its peril.*

*A science that sought to understand the piece of nature that is the human being would be led seriously astray if it did not take account of the feelings (and phantasies and reminiscences and the like) that shape our inner lives: the choices we make, the things we do, the way we behave, who we are....*

*It [psychoanalysis] makes a serious attempt to come to grips with this aspect of nature...the complexities and difficulties of the inner world of subjective experience are part and parcel of the mind and how it works ... modern neuroscience has as much to gain from psychoanalysis as modern psychoanalysis has to gain from neuroscience.*

And, I would add, other disciplines also stand to gain from these new developments. As another neuroscientist Vilayanur Ramachandran commented in the BBC Reith lectures (2003) consciousness is a construct of unconscious processes, and complacency that rationality will somehow solve problems is unfounded. Therefore some of the methodology of psychoanalysis, that is, being subjective, having feeling, and paying attention to the experience, is also being advocated in emotional education, as well as trying to understand some of its concepts, such as 'the use of defenses'.

Now, the thesis that thought and thinking is dependent on emotional and physical states, is neither novel nor radical, especially to those who are interested in meaning, process and change. Nevertheless, however well-known, it seems to be profoundly important to re-state it and establish its consequences for practice, and show that valid methodology exists. It is more than important, it is necessary, when within current fashions for "evidence-based" practice, there is a repeat of invalid assumptions which one might have hoped had been laid to rest.

In both immediate and global frameworks, the results of mistaken thought process (in research, policy or action, or all three) have been everything from frustrating to disastrous. For example, behaviourist psychology is applied across a too wide domain (learning for "literacy targets" say), or the statistics of sociology become truths, not trends. Discussion usually claims to be rational, reduction is mistaken for focus, simplistic is accepted as clarification, and change is initiated. The results may include expected or intended outcomes, but unintended outcomes and failures to change are rife. A devastating culture of evaluation and blame and falsity perpetuates the cult of reason, based on naive cause and effect arguments. A common factor is the dissociation from particular and whole experiencing (such as in the use of phrases like 'minimised casualties of war').

In my work in education, even more with colleagues than with students, it feels sad to come across poor practice too frequently, though it is always 'others' who are unthinking or inflexible. Overall it shows when "the only practical response" is actually an authoritarian or spoon-feeding style of education, and everyone is working too hard and at the same time is too disillusioned or disaffected or cut-off from reflective space to take a real look at the whole process. The kinds of dialogue needed to keep oneself involved, without, as one student put it, "*being sucked in*", are rarely straightforward.

One essential question, which also frustrates, is : *Why?*

*Why do mistakes, uncritical thought, cultural norms and false certainties, such as slavish adherence to a "competency" system of education, or to the "correct" preparation of a unit of work, or to behavioural views of psychology, etc., continue to need re-addressing?*

In the light of the evidence of what people have done and continue to do, it is not possible to suppose that *description and understanding* of prejudiced or fallacious thinking will mean such patterns do not re-occur, or that *description and analysis* of creative thought or reflective process will automatically ensure it, though such articulation undoubtedly helps. Almost everyone agrees that they hope to act from a reflective, adaptable and developmental perspective, but, as Michael Faraday once put it (Faraday 1833):

*...men (sic) are so often bowed down and carried forward from fallacy to fallacy, their eyes not being opened to see what that fallacy is...the more acute a man is, the more he is bound by the chains of error; for he only uses his ingenuity to falsify the truth which lies before him*

If feelings are unpleasant, of guilt, say, or shame and blame, the kinds of feelings associated with mistakes, it is hard to explore the ways in which we might be perpetuating particular patterns in faulty thinking. But, unless we consider it necessary to suppose that prejudiced, assumptive and fallacious thinking will indeed occur, and re-occur, again and again, whatever our hope or intention, or feelings, we cannot begin. As a student put it "*Can I find what presses my buttons, will I want to?*".

There is an emotional approach to thought which enables this beginning. Seeking self-awareness is an obvious starting point in view of the knowledge that thought arises from emotions in the unconscious, it is not sufficient. An emotional mode of enquiry is an existential finding of feeling and relationship (analogous to psychoanalytic enquiry, but with distinctly different aims). I will claim that making it can shift the balance between falling into stuck and prejudiced patterns and opening up to more fruitful and accurate ways of thinking, and elicit some necessary factors. Emotional education makes this shift more probable, whether or not the individual has developed in emotional maturity.

Again, Faraday, within his focus of interest in the process of scientific discovery, expressed his understanding succinctly (Faraday, 1854):

*Among those points of self-education... there is one... difficult to deal with, because it involves an internal conflict and equally touches our vanity and our ease. It consists in the tendency to deceive ourselves regarding all we wish for, and the necessity of resistance to these desires...*

*... This education has for its first and last step humility. It can commence only because of a conviction of deficiency; and if we are not disheartened under the growing revelations which it will make, that conviction will become stronger unto the end .. (pp 475, .485, emphases in the original)*

One of my students said (all student comments are from student evaluations, 2002):

*...this elective was subtle and less traditionally academic...a new wave at the educational front... will leave its mark on years to come,*

*and another, I had never met a sense of fear of which was so full of promise and excitement.*

Both students found themselves able to give up seeking 'short-term' rational perspectives, and put trust in a different mode of thought.

## 2. Systemic Thinking

Freud's greatest discovery may have been to make a particular contribution to the way in which subjective and objective thinking can be connected, each enhancing the other. He created a form of practice in which he abandoned the attempt to be "objective" about his patient, and instead steadily uncovered the characteristics of the process in which he and his patient were actually engaged. In this form of enquiry he, as a self, was seen in the 'system' of himself and his patient, and, at the same time, he saw himself as in a process where the 'system' became *in him* as well as something external in which he took a part.

This self-reflexive engagement with surroundings led first to psychoanalytic method, and to psychoanalytic theories of mental process. Both methods and theories have developed in over more than a century to embrace a variety of psychodynamic insights, concepts and applications. Freud's awareness of his enquiry process, and his definition of 'transference'<sup>1</sup> led to an exploration and understanding of the unconscious mind which was intelligible. It is actually a deeper version of "Systemic thinking", a here-and-now existential practice also used in other fields, such as anthropology and management theory. These fields have also been enriched by the understanding of unconscious emotional process (e.g. Campbell et al 1994, Kenrick, 2001).

"Systemic thinking" can be defined as not looking for statements about a situation, but for provisional and partial explanations (or images) which illuminate the here-and-now. The idea of being inside or outside a system is recognised as being itself a thought construction. In systemic thinking, the need to decide 'inside' or 'outside' disappears. Accepting that the whole is discernible in each part and that each part is influential in the whole, the experience in the here-and now is of a tension between separateness (e.g. personal identity) and relatedness (e.g. belonging to a group). Freud's methodological discovery, now encapsulated in the concepts of transference and countertransference<sup>2</sup>, was that this tension could itself be attended to. Expressed as "here-and-now", the multi-layered dynamic experience of the present is the crucial material for thought and thinking. Also crucial, is the realization that this attention means "thoughts" can be considered as engendered, from inside, or from outside the mind. The former as in Solms' quote (above, p.2) includes phantasies, and reminiscences and the like, the latter may even be what Bion called 'truth': a thought which exists without a thinker, waiting for the thinker to bear it and bring it into the realm of the known (see Bion, 1970 and Crawford, 1998) .

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<sup>1</sup> Transference: a complex pattern of unconscious thoughts and feelings (unconscious fantasy in Kleinian terms), expectations, anxieties, and defences which the person brings into the present

<sup>2</sup> Counter-transference: Someone perceives me in a particular way and relates to me in a particular way - part of me finds this emotionally resonant (difficult or pleasurable), and it triggers my past part/patterns, my own transferences. I am experiencing *counter - transference*.

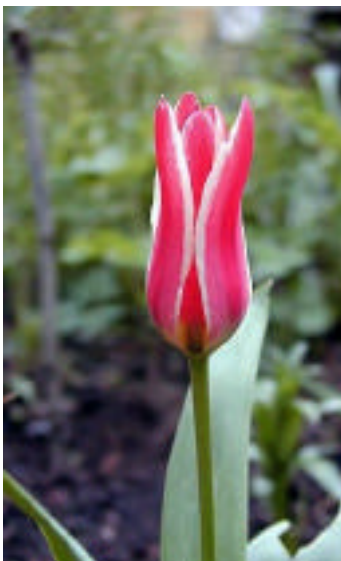
Rather obviously, as thought, or its expression, is entangled somehow with the subjectivity of persons, then any notion, whether it is a definition or a belief, or a concept, or a 'guide to placement activity' or an organisation's mission statement, whatever, is resting on the thought systems of people with emotions and history and purposes, in the here-and-now. No thought, however conceptually framed or developed, and including my own thesis and perspective, can be above suspicion of invalidity. That does not mean it is actually invalid, only that we cannot know.

Emotional enquiry therefore turns attention more towards the *nature of the thinking about thinking*, rather than what is being thought, and involves *experiencing while not-knowing* rather than seeking knowledge of the experience.

### **3. Emotional Education - what is it?**

In the practice of education of any kind, good or bad, what happens is underpinned by the emotional climate in which it takes place. Two recent collections (Best and Geddes 2002, and Barford, 2002) cover work which, pre-supposing a systemic emotional engagement, relate psychodynamic practice to education and thought. "Emotional education" is similar, operating at two levels: learning about emotional processes, and exploring emotional awareness in the here-and-now.

In its presentation and activity, it aims to influence the type of participation of those involved and to affect their personal processes to a greater or lesser extent. I now concentrate on security for participants to experiment, rather than worrying about whether what is happening is education or therapy. I use a lot of visual aids, just pictures, which stimulate feeling. I also arrange furniture, set group tasks, and invent as I go along in response to the people, the body-language, the setting and the needs I happen to see. I have become convinced that "systemic thinking" and the use of ones emotional self in all kinds of contexts is an enquiry which produces valid thinking and fruitful change. However, as Adam Phillips said in an Edinburgh Festival lecture *the problem with listening is that you hear*, similarly, the problem with systemic process is that one is in a changing system and, like it, is changing.



One student said:... *initial impressions ... its all a bunch of tree hugging hippie crap ... I went along to this class, mainly as support for a friend ...*

*Elsbeth's techniques... opened up a whole can of worms for me ...*

*I realised that this module would be good for me and give me an excellent insight into my own life, who I am, and how to get the best from those I mean to teach...*

*I got a lot out of the experience ... a great sense of achievement ... reaching out to some very difficult and, more importantly, attention starved kids...*

This student's final course report included a comment from the headteacher of his placement school about work the student had done. She said that the motivation of two particularly difficult pupils had been a marvellous piece of work and that she was amazed at the effect that [the student] was having in such a short time.

Emotional Education means working to educate oneself emotionally. We already know that it is possible through experience to be emotionally sensitive to others and to have emotional intelligence, even wisdom, about people, cultures and organizations in society, so that one acts well, for human good. *However, we also know that the emotional processes by which we cope with our experiences are as likely to produce insensitivity or stupidity.*

Emotional processes in themselves do not hold value for good or for bad. If we want unconscious emotional processes to occur which result in thought and action which is valued, *we cannot rely on the chance of good experience occurring.* There is an 'entropy' principle: what happens, happens, therefore a conscious arrangement of some of the pre-existing and boundary conditions is needed to weight the probability towards particular kinds of happening. We make choices about at least some of these, and 'not-choosing' is also a choice. Emotional Education's position is that we need (i) to become aware of what is happening in emotional process *and also* (ii) we need to learn how to influence this happening. Therefore it teaches about emotional process, *explicitly* using activities which seem to make sense to students.

*This forum is I think something lacking elsewhere...*

*It really does make sense!!*

*...yet another occasion where I think I already knew something but needed it to be pointed out to me...yet again taught me as much about myself as about how to relate to others...*

The bit of psychodynamics most valued by students seems to be that it sees the unconscious, the subjective and the irrational as part and parcel of their own everyday here-and now activities. Therefore it attends to what their emotions actually are and helps make meaning of this dimension of their experience.

*I remember theory such as transference, attachment theory, group dynamics, and of most interest to me, defence mechanisms. But I remember learning a lot more than just the theory. I learned how to listen. I learned how to empathise. And most importantly, I learned how to deal with my anxieties and concerns safely. Essentially however, I learned that to be able to manage children's feelings and emotions efficiently, we first have to be able to deal with our own in the same way...*

From experience, I have found a general pattern needs to be addressed:

- a 'secure base' (emotional safety, see Bowlby, 1979) with agreement regarding the nature of the work is essential
- some work on defences and the reality of unconscious fantasy and transference is needed, as knowing that a good theory exists seems to give individuals permission to experiment<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> it also functions as a "container" see Kalu, 2002

- each of three levels of experience, individual, group and organisational experiences, are addressed with whatever depth the course participants can manage in the time they have available
- always, authority, power and differences are live issues, and emotions are on a roller-coaster of learning experiences, "out there" with children, teenagers and teachers, and "in here".
- sadly, equally often, some kind of ethical issue appears, and what works is to consider how the person concerned can be supported
- finally, counter-transference, or, 'using oneself', is a backbone within the work done, built-in to the "techniques" which so impressed the sceptical student quoted above. *This way of working is reviewed and discussed so that students can practice or play with the idea for themselves, and build their own way of using self.*

It seems that "Emotional Education" *increases the likelihood* that unconscious processes will be in tune with aware intentions and needs. All sorts of other interests, aims and responses deepen and become more realistic at the same time. Participants do a lot of listening to each other's experiences and then try to see if an idea from theory helps make sense of a particular experience (a notion of defenses for example). As tutor, I have to choose what I think will help (something about 'splitting'?; recognizing defenses, transference in everyday life?; Winnicott's 'transitional space'?; Attachment, 'secure base', kinds of insecurity?; Bion, and learning? etc.). The work done aims to set up use of self, a habitual monitoring process of 'what's happening, to me and around me'. This is, I think, the emotional education.

More comments from student evaluations are:

*..this elective has helped me immeasurably...*

*I was amazed at how much of the theory I could initially relate to*

*major asset is the knowledge from listening to the experiences of others, especially talking from an emotional standpoint ...*

*I think that it should be for everyone on an education course.*

*I would highly recommend that this elective become compulsory, as there is so much to be taken out of it...*

#### **4. Thought, and emotional risk**

Psychoanalysts, particularly Wilfred Bion (1984), have identified differing thought processes in ways which correlate with the work of sociologists such as Friere (1970) and philosophers such as Whitehead (1925, 1938). (See White, 2002, and Crawford, 2000). Recent work on "attachment" lists behavioural distinctions, such as flexibility or rigidity, which can be seen in adults (e.g. Holmes 1997). In emotional education, these classifications are used to offer a template by which students can see their own behaviours as enactments of inner security, or forms of insecurity. These exercises follow reflection and observation of real feelings evoked in the class. What the students have called "*having a wobble*" is considered to be a 'fulcrum' for unconscious choice made in

the here-and-now moment. The 'choice' made is that between emotional risk or emotional survival, the former creating a move towards flourishing, and the latter to a 'standstill', or into defensive cul-de-sacs. In considering how this choice, an unconscious response, occurs, we find clues as to how unconscious choice-making can be influenced by conscious decision..

Object Relations theory describes an unconscious response to the experience of distress, called "splitting". The subject, the "I", is not OK, the input is too much or too little for the felt need. Mental pain, from discomfort to chaos or madness threatens, and "I" (the self, or, the 'ego') *splits*. It keeps a part which can function, a "good" part, and gets rid of the "bad" part which is deemed to belong to the 'object', that is, the "not-I" which is also present to perception. Obviously, the kind of continued and continuing relationship offered by the 'other', is crucial to the quality and the severity of the splitting.

Survival by splitting is a so-far, so-good process, a short term answer to difficulty. "I" survived, my ego can continue its job of managing inner/outer complexity, but there have been some costs. The "bad" is lost as experience which can be 'thought' about, unless it meets an 'other' who can empathise and return it to me in a form I can cope with. The 'good' is assumed as an unqualified state. The cost is that "I" do not actually know exactly what is down to me and what belongs to the external environment, and I cannot by myself challenge my faulty view. It seems likely that fallacies in thought, such as the too narrow focus of attention, or insisting that a model encompasses reality, or mistaking or misallocating the range of adequacy of a method, etc. could have roots in this emotional process.

Splitting is however a necessary process. If the emotional mind, is to contain the tensions between 'good and bad' in a creative way, it is crucial that the splitting is embedded in a much more complex emotional dynamic, that it is only a first part in a sequence of mental events. The experience of a child illustrates this more complex development.

Father and daughter, with mother following, are striding out on an adventure. Something happens and suddenly an adventurous little girl is alone on a rather large beach.



*"Uh Uh Am I OK here?"*



However, Daddy is not far away, so this 'wobble' does not last long. What has happened?



Possibly, for a moment the world contains *tension between safety and danger*. Just possibly, Daddy has held that, as well as holding his daughter, as she is not overwhelmed, and what she hears with her emotional heart is not just "I am loved" , but, "my world is both safe and unsafe".

The paradox, "a risk is OK", is perceived, and, psychologically, she grows, so that another time, she may hold the tension for herself.

*She learns that an anxious state can even be a welcome way of finding out something new about the big wide world.*



As a consequence, this child may be safe by the sea, because she neither trusts it nor fears it excessively, but knows that to find out about it, she has to see different aspects of what she is looking at. Bearing tension is a more involved process than splitting.

Hence, a clue to flourishing is that tensions are *held*, not resolved. And, one conscious act anyone can make to enable this holding can be the decision to talk and listen to other people, in dialogue which includes emotional sensitivity. Even though 'other' can be a reflective aspect of oneself acquired through previous internalisations, we need all the help we can get.

Object-relations theory makes a clear distinction between *two sorts* of process:

- any sequence which demands ease from mental pain or anxiety, so that contradictory tension (ambivalence) is denied, reduces the range of experience which contribute to thought. Only certain states of mind, those of known value, are accessible.
- the process which tolerates or 'bears' the anxieties and stresses of having ambivalent or contradictory inner states, increases the range. Thoughts which can be entertained include more of anomaly, doubt and uncertainty. If 'ease' happens, inner and outer reality happen to be in tune, as in the baby picture shown much earlier (p.1), so one experiences the genuine ease which can be a lasting joy .

In a recent paper, Davou (2002) summarises the work of Zajonc (1980) on "subliminal exposure theory". This is the split-second perception from the outside world which one takes in without awareness, but which nevertheless influences very significantly how one next responds. Subliminally, the notion *'tension and anxiety is OK and can be thought about'* enables a move to the mature processes which are a profoundly different response at the 'fulcrum of choice' than a splitting which denies tensions. This seems to me to be another way of saying that what happened *in a moment* on a beach could be more

significant than a large collection of other moments, and suggests a way to think about change in adulthood. Neuroscience (Ramachandran, 2003) has indeed recently suggested that even the deeper structures of mind are more plastic than was previously supposed, and that change can happen at any age.

Possibly, what therapists and counsellors offer when they 'listen' and respond, is a subliminal exposure of themselves in a "*stay with the uncertainty*" kind of state. The parallel here with early childhood is not regression theory. It is anyone, child or adult, (i) has emotional need which makes them turn to look for a trusted 'other', (ii) that the trusted other has to be there at the moment of looking, and (iii) that the other can offer the "tension is held" experience, which contains both risk and safety, for the particular feelings in the particular wobble moment.

*The second clue to flourishing is that it happens here-and-now, in the particular moment.* The unconscious moment, containing the whole of the individual's perceiving of self and other at that time, expected or anomalous, is not generalisable. In the fulcrum position, something 'other', and the 'particular', are essential to choice. Once our unconscious state moves out of the fulcrum position, applying the 'previously known', we can generalise, sometimes helpfully, sometimes not. We have then effectively institutionalised our inner world and allowed what Freud named as the 'super-ego' (Roth 2001) to have (temporary?) control of our thought processes.

### **5. Active Participation (or de-stabilising institutions)**

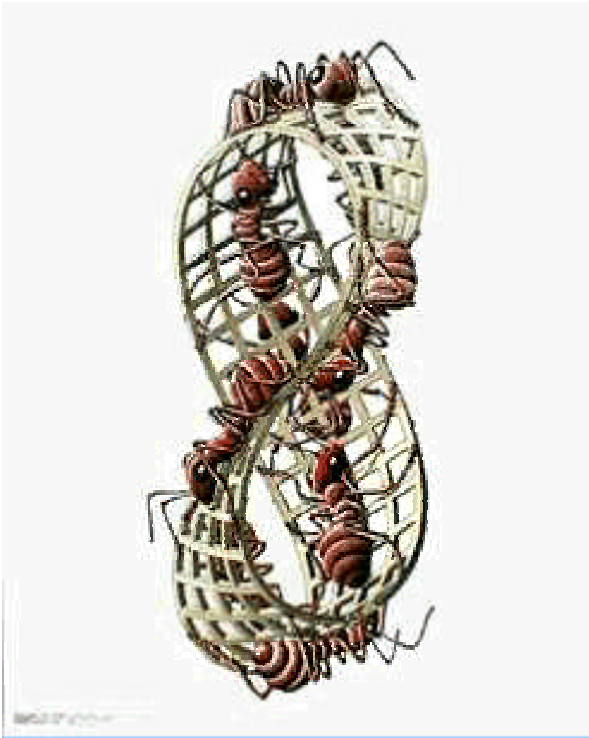
Before concluding, I want to use models to help think again about why these conclusions, which are not new regarding thought process, are evidently difficult to stay with, even for those who are convinced of their worth.



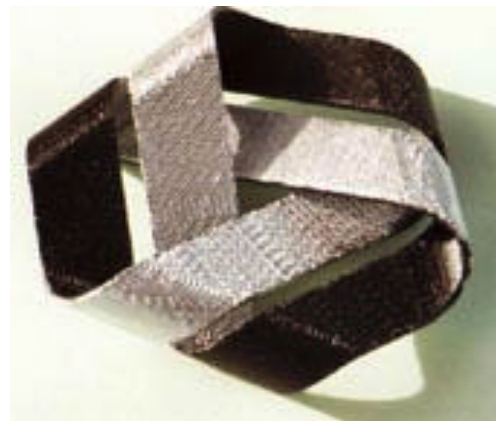
Flourishing, like life, holds many aspects, separation and decay, as well as difference and connection, unity, identity and capacity for change. This can be represented by the double helix. When a break, or 'wobble', occurs, the ends succeed in making connections with an appropriate "other" , a good attuned connection.

In thinking about 'breaks' a necessary part of mental life, I am indebted to Anne MacDonald (2002), a forensic psychiatrist from Glasgow, for her representation of the effects of different kinds of breaks and joins, using a simple ring or a mobius strip, though she is not responsible for the following. Beginning with the ring, there is an inside and an outside, a black and white say, two surfaces connected only by whatever is in the depth between them. A ring can turn into a mobius strip if it breaks, and is twisted, so that when re-joined the separate surfaces have become one. Different breaks and joins, with or without the twist make all kinds of knots and tangles, or helices, depending on what is found as the broken ends seek a rejoin. Whatever the complexity

there are essential differences between the single surface of the mobius strip, the double surfaces of the ring, or the multiple dimensions, and connections, in the helix. On the strip, like Escher's ants (Escher 1963) forever on one surface, living has no tensions between different worlds, only 'stop' or 'go', following 'the rules'. On a ring, or more complex knot, ants on the different surfaces might continue forever in endless parallel worlds. (But they might also, through trial and error, like Popperian conjecture and refutation, learn slowly.)



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Recall again that in the notion of systemic thinking, one is oneself a part of the system. Anne described the profound differences in her own feeling and sense of herself which occurred when she worked with disturbed and dangerous 'others' in prison. People with "two surfaces", however hard to reach, had strong passions and black and white views. They understood the rules, and why they had broken them, and why they were in prison. In out of prison terms, these people are moralistic, rather than moral, and in thought terms, they make mistakes of ignorance and assumption. These 'in the moment' reactions in people, are emotionally immature, and so is the thinking process happening at that moment, however complicated its content. In spite of this, Anne said she found it relatively easy to work, even when individuals were wholly immature or violent, as *she did not feel her own sense of self in danger of being overcome*.

She declared the one-surface model (formed by making a twist) much more difficult, both to see, and to influence, because in making a relationship of any kind with such a person, or the 'twist' part of a person, one had to join them on the single surface, whatever it was. One is 'sucked in' to the existing system, drawn in by ones own ordinary needs in contact with others (assuming trust, making a living, etc.). Instead of being able to take part in a dialogue, one loses ones own vision, or perspective. Anne said it was essential to find other people who related differently, and 'get out' of such a system, otherwise one would be seduced. A twist in response to a break includes the manipulative, the emotional blackmailer, the con-man and the abuser as well as the workaholic portrayed by Escher, because no other way of being can be seen. The idea corresponds to hegemony of belief

which distorts everyone's experience. Institutional and cultural examples are those firms like "Enron" where a profit motive divorced from value existed, or the evidence of the Macpherson report of institutional racism, and the Stevens report of institutional collusion in murder in Northern Ireland. To work well in such a context, one needs a sense of ethics, as ordinary response (especially rational response) will itself become twisted, and, more importantly, in emotional terms, our sense of self is betrayed by our own need for interaction with others.

Anne's comment was that the only way out was to see the break and twist for what it was, *a distortion which seemed like a good idea at the time*, and what one really needs is the totally uncomplicated view of someone ordinary with no axe to grind: the child who saw the emperor naked, or, in real life, the chat with the secretary at the photocopier. She purposely makes time for such ordinariness, so that there is room for 'see yourself as others see you', from a distance, as well as need for relationship, dialogue and understanding. Then, "the distortion which seemed like a good idea at the time" can be 'finding the break, re-breaking, and trying a different kind of join". In therapeutic understanding, counsellors know that to help someone, they often have to be seduced into failure, so they are in the kind of failure this person has previously experienced. They, unlike their client, may know the way out, and, unlike most professionals, they have supervisors who are as *interested* in the process of failing, as they are in the process of succeeding. From emotional education experiences, it seems to me that the 'twist' is more difficult to find in organisations, as day-to-day experience of authority, especially that of hierarchy and tradition, hide its effects within what seems like 'good practice' at the time. (But one can wonder why Scotland loses 40% of its teachers in the first five years after initial qualification, Sharp and Draper, 2000.)

In an even more ordinary description, we are talking about consequences, and being willing to see consequences clearly, especially the immediate consequences or fallout from what we do, as well as the intention. Another picture which pleases emotional education students very much, as one of their big issues is always about authority and discipline, shows a child, not yet one year old, who can walk but not talk, just after she

had discovered how to open the fridge door and engage in delighted exploration of its contents.



The eye-contact is palpable, and her mother has no doubt that the meaning of her words, whatever they are, is conveyed through her physical emotional message: We put things in the fridge, we don't toss them out... you got that *wrong*... The students enjoy the discussion about how such a message is made absolutely clear, and not confused by punitive smacks, or loss of love, or avoidance of the issue. (I tell them that I know this fridge door was never 'child-proofed'.)

A student described emotional education classes as:

*... the opportunity to actually take time to think about me and the way I react to situations and people, and use these reactions in a more positive way*

In other words, if you can see what you are doing, and its effects, and become interested, *failure is just as interesting as doing well*. The prejudiced, assumptive and fallacious thinking which occurs, and re-occurs, again and again, is part of a wider system in which there is someone who pays attention. Here, I have reached a place where I can discuss, however briefly, why *conscious interest in emotional process might be sufficient to enable better unconscious thought process*.

I have reached what I have called the backbone of emotional education (p.7), *using self*. This is an ordinary conscious means to become interested in different kinds of unconscious choice: staying on the edge of uncertainty, protecting against the problems of splitting, and observing, with ordinary humility, how one is vulnerable, and 'joins the institution', or makes mistakes. The importance of the 'use of self' idea is that it can be *consciously* practised.

## **6. The Observer Self**

In the different kinds of response to 'wobble', the capacity to resist unconscious flaws in thinking depends on what we are exposed to as well as our own tendencies.

In writing about equality, Thompson (1998) pointed out that

*internalisation is the process whereby something (characteristics, values, attitudes, a way of being) first met outside the self becomes incorporated as part of self identity*

*...identity is a social construct, owing much to the interaction between structure and agency...[and] is continually forged in and by social interactions.. (p.35)*

He also identified two crucial concepts, "authenticity" and "bad faith":

*Authenticity involves being prepared to accept the challenge...that we are responsible for our actions...does not imply that we have full control over the circumstances that we find ourselves in...*

*Bad faith the denial of responsibility for our actions...is a form of self-deception in which we claim that our actions are beyond our control and we seek comfort and reassurance in some form of determinism, whether it be biological, psychological, environmental or even religious. (p. 28)*

In emotional education, as tutor, I can never know what the effects of what I do will be. The challenge which I accept is that I will operate as best I can, in 'use of self'. This is an existent listening to what is going on with me, in the system in which I am, and which is undoubtedly also in me. "Use of self" is a 'use anywhere' version of the therapist's 'counter-transference'. It can lead to real authenticity from others, rationally quite unexpected, over and over again.

For instance, a group of students were supposed to be reflecting on roles, responsibilities and authority, but my sense was 'this is a moan, I wish it was coffee break'. So I asked, "*will you still be in this frame of mind over coffee, or is it just in here?*" I then heard, jokingly, that in fact, they expected to moan even more at the break *as the coffee machine in their building (St Mary's) was out of order, and had been for nearly a term, and they had told the course leader, who as usual hadn't done anything...* And so it went on, until I said "Hang on a minute, take coffee seriously: responsibility? roles ? whose? ..." There was a sudden silence and then a whole series of intelligent comments about the job of catering. When coffee break came, the group headed for the main cafeteria, and one of them knocked the door of the catering supervisor, asking politely "who is in charge of the machine in St Mary's ?". "Me" she said, and the machine was fixed by lunchtime. "Coffee" may seem trivial, but each one of these students showed in many ways, that they now knew what was meant by "bad faith", and could spot moaning as a symptom.

Thompson's concepts of authenticity and bad faith are one way to illuminate whether or not the group, or an individual in a group, has internalised the 'use of self', or whether they still need someone else (only sometimes the tutor) to do it for them. Today, there is common ground within attachment theory, object relations, and neuroscience, and a steady progress towards the understanding of states of mind, that each of us can be either resilient or vulnerable to stress, or both, and the context matters. Some people have to learn how to 'use self', even when given a context where it is encouraged, and some continue to need others in specific contexts, which are stressful for them.

"Use of Self" begins with self-enquiry about one's personal emotional state, as it responds and relates to the object of attention in the immediate present. Involving students in talking about, and listening to, their own and others feelings has an immediately obvious first effect, *the destabilisation of "the rational institution" in the mind*. What they meet, especially in large groups, can be emotional maturity or immaturity in others, or it can be power, or powerlessness. This is the first point at which emotional education holds tension between fear and threat, threatening, and being threatened.

There is a myth, a mistaken view of what security consists of, that emotions *should* be stable. I think this happens because part of the self is identified, as in the one-surface mobius strip, with an unchanging 'institutional' part of identity. It is of course the identification which is weakening, as it is 'hooked' to something with an investment in staying the same, and cannot grow. Growth can restart when destabilisation offers another chance of taking in of 'new', and obviously the context offered at this point must favour "holding tension". From the beginning, a task is set, to learn to observe feelings, trying to be non-judgmental. It is strongly stated that we have feelings, and reactions to them, whether we like or dislike them, and being judgmental about them is just another reaction, so we don't demand that it disappears without effort.

Obviously, in Emotional Education, we are working in the realm of conscious awareness, though it is also stated that unconscious exists and that parts of it can be learnt about, by seeing what our reactions are. So, prior to the 'use of self', the notion of an observer, and an observer-self is developed. The 'observer-self idea' lets emotionality develop as an asset to task purposes, and is often counter to socialisation processes which we may have

previously experienced, about not-feeling, and not watching others. We practice observing others first, and giving feedback, and observing oneself emerges out of that as everyone is *within the process* and everyone is affected by the way in which each individual takes part. The idea of the 'observer self' attempts to keep non-judgmental notice of oneself and of oneself in relation to others, and is very distinct from critical observation of others as though one were outside the interactions. This is what makes it emotionally safe, and if students who have not yet seen the difference have difficulty, we just talk about what the difference might be. *It is that we observe the process we are in.*

For example, a small group can do some work, which has a value in itself. Someone is asked to observe. They do this as best they can, by paying attention to the different ways people take on roles, watching non-verbal cues, noticing feelings and attitudes, commenting on personal or cultural backgrounds, whatever. From feedback, what is observed or experienced is connected with someone else's observation from their different perspective, then at least some of what has happened is seen as part of a wider process and everyone has a little more insight than before.

This kind of learning is actually a matter of experience followed by insight. Ideas can help insight, but are not the same thing, so one cannot as a tutor have a 'learning outcome' to aim for. Instead, one's job is to enable the connections from which insight can follow. The idea is that being an observer internalises an observer in one's mind, making connections between feeling, doing and process as one engages in 'any task'. With beginning groups, however experienced or inexperienced individuals may be, this job will involve owning anxiety about feelings.

The following are also usually part of what is defined or asked for from the beginning:

- the 'process' observed refers to here-and-now awareness of socio-emotional areas of interaction, for example non-verbal actions, and apparent feelings and moods
- everyone takes turns being observers
- this is stated to be developing the 'observer-self'
- the 'observer-self' considers own emotionality an asset to their role, and are encouraged to say what they felt as they observed
- difference and differences between individuals are strongly valued, especially becoming interested in people having different feelings about the same event
- everyone is asked to record, for themselves, via a private journal, as a 'writer-self' is another kind of observer

These actions tap into what I have called "clues" (pp 9,10 above). I conclude these are necessary attributes of the 'emotional thinking' which enables flourishing. They are:

- *Uncertainty, or the 'wobble', is accepted, so that the emotional world view is unstable*
- *The unconscious choice is to 'stay with' uncertainty, and seek 'other'*
- *"Other" is there to be found, either as a previously internalised accepting way of being, or in the external context*
- *Consciously, in the present, one uses an observing self to relate empathically to self and others*

However inexperienced anyone is at 'process' observing, making the attempt at self-and-other observation, and acknowledging the similarities and differences seen, creates a context where 'using self' can start, or re-start, as a way of being. Each person is then better able to seek, and sometimes find, their own 'wobble' spaces, or 'wobble' contexts. A 'split' can be modified, an institutional part of self can open up, and being vulnerable becomes a question of finding the right kind of support.

I am suggesting that it is not what one discovers when 'using self' which creates the better thinking, as that would be like setting rational tasks for self-improvement. These are done, and they do help, just as describing the nature of thought has helped. I am claiming something different.

***I believe it is the existent event that self has observed and questioned self which makes the difference, because then one is holding an existential tension, "I am both self, and an object to myself".***

The institutionalised self is automatically destabilised, and a new chance to engage at a fulcrum of choice exists. When this happens, it is an emotional education.

The consequences of better emotional thinking are well documented in management literature as well as in more therapeutic writing (see e.g. Fineman, 2000, or Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002). It seems to me that different kinds of internal process in thinking, and different kinds of pattern in influence within organizations, are linked, by 'process thought' which is *emotionally systemic*. They are just different 'wholes' and 'parts' of a single or multiple organization. The use of self applies whatever the range or purpose, but it does affect how one chooses purpose and brings value and ethics into a central position, and it certainly affects the kinds of 'wobble' experienced. And, in the external organizations, cultures and institutions of society, the 'finding other' and the power and authority positions of these others, enormously shift the balance of influence from individual to context. A hopeful comment from a student is:

*...emotional education, for absorbing frustration, a medal should be struck...the quality of everything has altered.... I can do more, but I am more relaxed....*

If use of self does indeed offer a conscious way of creating change towards better thinking, "process philosophy" has now offered meaning and value beyond its origins, while at the same time it has shown that it has intuitively been at the fulcrum point all along.

*The extraordinary power of process philosophy is that it is able to provide a link from the most fleeting moment of immediate experience to our unexamined everyday world of thing, as well as to the highest abstractions of science and the profound richness of human experience expressed in poetic and religious insight. (Hayward 1984 p. 243)*

I would like to ask some questions students have come up with:

Are emotions value judgements, because we feel them as 'good' or 'bad', or is value just an accident of survival?

There is no excuse for abuse, but do you think that emotional explanation can reduce damage after the event or even make it OK?

Does emotional maturity, using self, mean the concept of will, choosing to do it, is other than emotional?

If using self enables you to see something wrong, but you have no power, how can you "whistle-blow" and not get yourself in deep trouble?

Finally, my thanks, and acknowledgement, to all the students, and the family, who have said I can talk or write about them, including those whose words have not been quoted. I hope my granddaughter, who has not given permission, will think the way I have used her pictures is OK. I owe a very real debt of gratitude to everyone who has shared their feelings, and let them be material for 'emotional thinking about thinking'.

Elsbeth Crawford, May 2003.

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