

Peer-Reviewed Article

Embodying Experiential Learning:

Cultivating Inner Peace in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper presents a reflection on experiential teaching and an experiment in embodied learning for peacebuilders and changemakers. The theories, practices and experiments are part of a postgraduate course in Peace of Mind, offered at the University of Sydney. The intention of this course is to invite the reader to see experiential learning and awareness-based practices as tools that enable the possibility to evolve our humanness. Interdisciplinary abstract methodologies from Indigenous and phenomenological philosophies support the argument that granular and qualitative knowledge emerges through the embodiment of human expression. It addresses the concept of fragmentation of the self, the importance of pausing and giving voice to knowledge that words cannot convey. Through the arts, the paper shows non-linear forms of communication with visual experiments. The purpose of this collaborative work is in the craft, the process, and beyond the authorship.

Keywords

experiential learning, Indigenous wisdom, consciousness, social arts, embodiment, inner peace, peace of mind, higher education.

Introduction

How do you teach and assess learning which does not rely only on cognitive, intellectual knowledge but also experiential and embodied experience? This paper presents a process in experiential teaching and an experiment in embodied learning in which enabling and embracing different types of human expression in higher education was both encouraged and accepted. This experiment came about as part of the opportunity to redesign the postgraduate unit of study *Peace of Mind: The Psychology of Peace*, a core unit of the Master of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia.¹ Peace builders and changemakers who work in development and security, choose peace and conflict studies for its interdisciplinary approach. Is epistemological analysis based on disciplinary theories enough to understand the implications of reproducing the development, peace, and security that we want to see globally? The authors of this article believe it is not. This paper argues that students who learn only through cognitive and linear reasoning will not be equipped to solve complex structural conflicts. Peace and conflict, along with peace and security, conflict transformation and conflict resolution studies will need to include abstract concepts to work with the inner self through experiential and embodied learning.

The quality of outcomes for people depends on the inner place from which they operate (Scharmer, 2016). Merleau-Ponty suggests that coherence originates from the inner experience (2014, p. 58). But “what do we know about that inner place?” (Scharmer, 2016, pp. 27–28). The intention to redesign the course departed from the premise that to know ontological peace and security—an inner sense of feeling peace and safety—requires experiential learning to experiment with the granular quality of emotions. Theory U, an awareness-based systems approach that “makes a system *sense* and *see* itself” (Scharmer, 2018, p. 17), was used for the redesign of the course in order to discern qualitative knowledge. As humans evolved, new technologies offered greater power; but as power grew, wisdom was left behind (Senge, et al. 2004, p. 187). If we are to embody a new perspective on peace and security, this paper argues that it is necessary to incorporate experiential awareness-based practices and dive deeply into both philosophical and phenomenological approaches on experiential consciousness. Inspired by abstract methodologies from Indigenous wisdom and phenomenological philosophies, the course was redesigned to better understand

¹ The possibility to redesign *Peace of Mind: The Psychology of Peace* emerged from a project led by Wendy Lambourne with Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon focused on curriculum transformation intended to enhance collaborative and interactive learning associated with an authentic assessment.

how self-expression through the social arts can contribute to a more holistic and coherent understanding of peace.

This paper is a collaborative work. It is based both on Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon's input, when she was invited as the new teacher and co-coordinator for the course taught during the first semester in 2020, and a reflection on the course content and assessment experiment from a student, Penny Vozniak. The Peace and Conflict Studies program attracts students who aim to work with vulnerable people in the context of direct or structural violence. Initially, the unit of study had two different groups, face-to-face and online classes. But after four weeks, like many others, the country went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the rest of the semester was delivered online for both groups. At this time, holding a safe space felt essential while engaging with complex topics that were part of the curriculum. Rodriguez Carreon and Carrillo acknowledge that when applying awareness-based practices it is critical to bring "responsibility to hold the space and enable difficult conversations" (2021, p. 125). Students were encouraged to reflect on their lived experiences through awareness-based practices in order to connect with the meaning of inner and outer peace.

The Unit of Study curriculum was divided into twelve teaching modules and two workshops.² This paper aims not to analyze in detail the course structure, but rather to focus on the content and approaches that the two authors experienced in teaching and learning. The redesign of this course was aligned with the University's learning, teaching, research and engagement programs to support cultural competence education by including interdisciplinarity and Indigenous knowledge. One of the assignments relied on abstract methodologies; it was the results of this new kind of assessment task that inspired this paper. The assessment invited students to reflect on their understanding of *peace of mind*. They were encouraged to explore alternative media or formats in addition to, or instead of the written 'essay' format where a formal reference list or bibliography was not required.

However, they were required to indicate the sources of inspiration beyond the traditional scholarly literature. They were encouraged to see, sense and feel its meaning. The invitation to express through different literacies was an experimental epistemology, an exploration of the meaning of peace by thinking through processes and lived experiences in order to experiment with *invisible* body manifestations. The assessment was not a judgment of the students' experience, but an exploration of the process. They were welcome to choose photography, scribing, painting, poetry, music, video, text, or *whatever way they*

² Vivianna as co-coordinator was responsible for redesigning and delivering six out of the twelve modules, and one workshop. Vivianna acknowledges the contribution of co-coordinator, Wendy Lambourne who was responsible for teaching and delivering the other modules and the second workshop.

*expressed themselves best.*³ Fast forward a year later, and inspired by the students' responses, Penny was invited to collaborate with this paper. Her reflection stood out for her experimental, arts-based approach to embodying the concept of inner peace, and the philosophies and literature that inspired her work, intrinsically related with the redesigned course content.⁴ Those same philosophies were the inspiration for Vivianna's redesign; to introduce phenomenological theories called abstract methodologies. In Penny's voice:

I wanted to find a way to give a human shape to the relationship between inner and outer peace, and to test out some of the more abstract concepts in the course. If emotions, thoughts, and sense perceptions were expressed as sounds and images instead of words, and then mapped back onto the body, would this new perspective change how I perceived and embodied these phenomena?

Providing the permission to introspect on internal processes and encouraging a different language of expression, enabled students to access and embody deep knowledge that cannot be expressed in words.

An Ontological Invitation to the Reader

The inspiration to teach inner knowing came from different disciplines, particularly phenomenology. Phenomenology in this sense is not a mental or physical view, but a unity between body and mind (Varela et al., 1993, p. 29). Indigenous knowledge also provided inspiration, "it must be close to impossible for indigenous cultures to convey their knowledge to us literates because we ask for it in the way we would write it down, in neat linear sequences. That is not how they know their stories." (Kelly, 2016, location No. 847). How do we know and relate to our own story? Decolonizing academic experiential methodology required a possibility to open new ways to conveying self-knowledge.

Inspired by these unconventional approaches, this paper embraces non-linear processes, whilst acknowledging resistance to non-linear expression in academia. The aim is to reproduce the unconventional course style in the paper

³ Although the results were remarkable, the coordinators noticed the risk taken by students to express creativity within the academic setting. This prompted us to question the limitations of educators to co-evolve for creativity in higher education when the possibility to create and innovate was not essential on the students' educational journey within a structural hierarchical institutional context (from high school to undergraduates).

⁴ Since this was not a research study with ethical approval to extract data from students' work and results, we cannot provide here an analysis of the range of works that emerged from the assessment. Instead, we tailored a narrative between teacher and student from their experience and relationship with content and assessment.

presentation. For example, the reader will notice that Penny's reflection uses the first-person voice. Also, the results of her experimental assessment draw from a combination of literacies, namely sound and visual. The presentation of this paper and its methods may trigger linear methodologists. We invite the reader to pause and witness the potential of *non-linear forms of expression in the educational environment*, as well as the paper's unconventional "structure".

Why? Because we want to take a step forward from "knowledge' in an analytical way" (Aikenhead & Mitchell, 2011, p. 69; Goodchild, 2021, p. 79) towards a "sense of collective historical subjectivity and agency and our 'embodied' accounts of the truth" (Haraway, 1988, p. 579) through different literacies.

Fragmentation of the Self

Using psychosocial, psychological, and philosophical approaches, the course presented the concept of self-fragmentation in lived experience. A key part of the course syllabus was learning how to deal with collectives that had conflicted past experiences, in other words, trauma. As trauma fragments, "incoherence" emerges and fractures the relations to the self (Hübl, 2020, p. 32). For Gabor Mate, it is the "unprocessed experience" where the self is disconnected from the self (2021). A traumatic event overloads the organic way of being, and consequently the expression of 'what happened' is not coherent in writing or speaking. Herman's unspeakable truth continues in this vein, stating that "the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*" (Herman, 1997, p. 1). But what is consciousness, and why is consciousness studies literature not found in interdisciplinary courses that prepare peacebuilders and changemakers, who in many cases will decide for those who have experienced the unspeakable? Consciousness arises from living the phenomenon, not analyzing meaning. It is a process of restoring the presence "of myself to myself" (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 16).

Presencing enhances sensing, just as sensing enhances seeing. Sensing extends seeing by moving our locus of attention "inside" a phenomenon. Presencing enlarges the activity of sensing by using our Self as a vehicle for deepening our sensing. The root of the word presencing is *es, which means "to be." (Scharmer, 2016, p. 164)

It is possible to say then that experiencing trauma fragments *the self and the self* and feeling presence restores *the self and the self*, as Figure 1 explains:

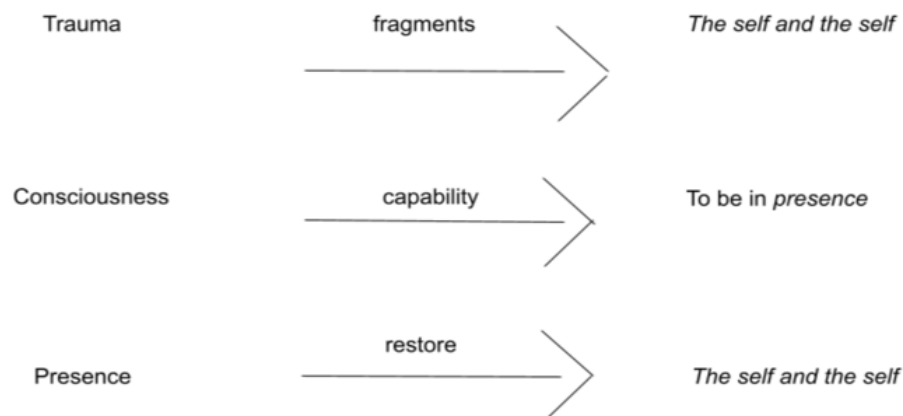


Figure 1: Relationship between Trauma, Consciousness and Presence
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Drawing inspiration from Krishnamurti's (1969) view of fragmentation as the origin of conflict, or consciousness divided, one of the course modules focused on *fragmentation*. At the same time, awareness became a tool to notice emotions that emerge when experiencing fragmentation. Trauma means fragmentation (Hübl, 2020). To understand the concept of *fragmented experience*, we need to know how peace of mind can be compromised. The central concept is that trauma is a broken experience (Van der Kolk, 2014; Mate, 2021; Herman, 1997), a disconnected expression of the self from the self.

The process of teaching and assessing was aligned to the session's topic and the way of teaching. Through an experiential learning activity, students were invited to sense the meaning of fragmented memory. A post-it note exercise was used to reflect on the meaning of fragmentation. This activity adapted from Rebecca Campbell's "Memories as Post-It Notes" (2014) analogy explains, when victims experience a traumatic event, it is like having the story written into separate post-it notes rather than one whole piece of paper. Each student narrated a random, short but real story in class, with each sentence split into several post-it notes, one after another. Then they spread out the post-it notes. Once the post-it notes are isolated, Campbell's analogy is amplified by challenging the audience to put together the post-it notes—now in several places—and at the same time imagine an environment of pressure, hierarchy and evaluation to reflect what is felt right after a traumatic experience. By breaking a coherent story⁵ into isolated words or phrases, students represent the fragmentation of the experience. Isolated words or sentences do not make sense. Through the experiential learning exercise, students were able to perceive how victim-survivors' peace of mind can get compromised through sensing

⁵ The story they were invited to write was not related to a trauma. It was suggested to write something they did the day before, but something that happened.

fragmentation, and at the same time, reflect on why victim-survivors are called to narrate their traumatic stories after decades of silence as a coherent expression. The self divides as the emotions emerging from the event are rejected. In exchange, Van der Kolk says that in a safe environment “normal memory integrates the elements of each experience into the continuous flow of self-experience by a complex process of association” (2014, p. 180).

A core reading on Fragmentation was Kristeva’s “Approaching Abjection”. The abject blurs the boundaries between the self with the self. It is the inner turmoil where meaning collapses, and the super ego emerges. Where the “repugnance” of the self-separates and forms the abject through objectivization of the Other. It is the denial of the self, the notion of repression, and the split between the “I” and the “Other” (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 2–3). It is also the emotional response to the rejection of the self, a breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is Other. The reading caused discomfort among the students.

At the beginning of the semester when I was introduced to this theory, I rejected it. Kristeva paints an unnerving vision that is difficult to contemplate, let alone integrate. Despite my initial aversion, I was repeatedly drawn back to the abject. Fear soon gave way to curiosity for the unspeakable.⁶

David Bohm explored the fragmentation phenomenon through the lens of theoretical physics and concluded that separation was at the root of the current crises faced by humanity. This psychological division into Self and Other has been called “a wrong turn” in human evolution (Krishnamurti, 1980). Believing that they were different and separate, humans sought to control and exploit Nature. Perhaps more dangerously, the accepted *human against nature*⁷ narrative created a blind spot that made it difficult to recognize the role humans play in the destruction of the planet. In search for inspiration on cultures where humans and Nature are one, one of the modules was dedicated to Indigenous knowledges.

Indigenous Knowledge

University courses in Social Sciences have normalized literacy as the preferred mode of academic expression; “literate” has become synonymous with being “educated”. Astonishingly, memory systems and encoded ways of communication in Indigenous languages were “allowed to fade from western education” (Kelly,

⁶ This was Penny’s comment regarding Kristeva’s reading.

⁷ We updated the age-old “man against nature” narrative to “human against nature”, because it is situated in the contemporary context, and because narratives are not static, they are meant to evolve.

2016, Location No. 831). Yunkaporta argues that “a focus on linear, abstract, declarative knowledge alone not only fails to create complex connectivity but damages the mind” (2019, p. 112). In Peru, according to The Guardian, Quispe Collantes made history by being the first doctoral student to defend a thesis in Indigenous oral language, Quechua (Collyns, 2019). However, it was also presented in writing irrespective of the fact that in oral languages some words are difficult to capture the meaning of, as they include several movements and embodiments in context. For Yunkaporta (2019), the difference between oral and ‘print-based’ cultures is the context. While orality links patterns and symbols, and depends on the field space, ‘print-based’ is defined through designing and itemizing in isolation. The cognitive analysis is in conceptualizing an idea into a word as a way of representing meaning. Kelly’s research also shows that landscapes were crucial in forming memory and creating knowledge across Indigenous cultures worldwide (2016). Capabilities on sensing the world and expressing its understanding in other ways that are as equally legible, valuable and recognized as ‘print-based’ hasn’t advanced simultaneously in higher education.

Colonialism alienated oral cultures and bestowed a sense of superiority to those able to read and write words, whilst denouncing other ways of being and other forms of symbolizing language as inferior ways to sense and to communicate. Indigenous cultures across the world were repressed in their ways of expression. This resulted in oral languages for centuries choosing sketches, drawing in codes, and relying on mnemonic technologies of memory such as textiles, out of the possibility to be equally valued to evolve for educational learning. The standardization in conceptualizing through writing as a linear method for teaching, learning and assessing has resulted in a hierarchy of human expression, and with that *power*. In education, writing rules was prioritized over phonetics. Yet, as Kelly points out, for most of human history, there was no writing (2016, Location No. 606), and whenever Indigenous knowledge was usurped and replicated in literature, many qualities of knowledge were lost (Kelly, 2016; Yunkaporta, 2019). Weave is an action of creation in several languages, like in Latin text means *texere* which is to “weave” (Chacon, 2020, p. 49), therefore for many early cultures an act of weaving was an act of conceiving knowledge. In this way, as Chacon states, “the words transform into designs” (2020, p. 59). In Australian songlines, Elders “sing their list of locations, visualizing them in memory and recalling the information associated with each place” (Kelly, 2016, Location No. 604).

A person of ‘high degree’ in traditional knowledge may find a song in a dream if they are profoundly connected to land, lore, spirit and community. But that song must then be taken up by the people and modified gradually through many iterations before it becomes part of the culture. Besides, that song can only be found through a ritual process developed over millennia by that community. The song itself is not as important as the communal knowledge process that produces it (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 71).

Yunkaporta's quote inspires us to focus on process and show us how culture forms and transforms through iterations. When people collectively do the same thing over an extended period of time, it becomes embodied, it creates a sense of belonging, it creates Culture (Menakem, 2017, p. 251). Culture is not static. Influenced and constructed socially and politically, it is evolutive, and for this reason it can also be innovative. For Tyson, cultural innovation needs a profound connection with the land and the people for the patterns of creations being visualized (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 71). For Indigenous people, the interdependence of human and Nature has never been in doubt. This is because "Indigenous means from place"⁸ (Perez-Barron, 2021). "I can read the bush"⁹, said Australian Aboriginal Elder Miriam Rose Ungunmerr (2017b) from the Daly River. The land is what they are, an extension of their body (Atkinson, 2002, p. 34). When Indigenous voices are heard at the United Nations and global environment forums, they are speaking on behalf of Nature. This alien worldview seeks to remind us that interconnectivity is the natural state of all human beings, not just an abstract concept.

Listening to *Pause*

How do we construct an innovative response to the continued violence perpetrated across all levels in a *complex system* interacting with multiple stakeholders (Lederach, 2005)? By listening to *Pause*.¹⁰

In pausing, we invite the reader to be a participant on the experiential component embedded in the three key elements used in Theory U to *open the mind, open the heart* and *open the will* (Scharmer, 2018, p. 25)—to risk. One of the first experiential activities that pre-established the way groups interact was the four listening levels of Theory U. Scharmer considers listening to be our most underrated skill. Students watched the video of 4 levels of listening: "downloading" (reconfirming what we know), "factual" (what is different than what we know), "empathic" (allows us to connect with the experience of the other), and "generative" (connects us with who we are and whom we want to be) (Scharmer, 2015; Scharmer, 2018, pp. 93–94). Then, students did a group exercise to notice in which moment what level they were listening from—downloading, factual, empathic, or generative. The dynamic was to discuss one of

⁸ Gina Perez-Barron in conversation with Gabor Mate at the online The Wisdom of Trauma - Expert Speaker Series. June 8-14, 2021.

⁹ Miriam Ungunmerr said this during The Art of Meditation and Dadirri talk in Sydney, 2017.

¹⁰ While not each module represents each of the subtitles in this paper. The modules focused on the topics explained in this paper. As well, different awareness-based practices, including listening, were embedded across Vivianna's modules.

the questions they usually prepare for the class.¹¹ The main idea was that when one group member spoke, the others were listening and trying to see from which listening level they were operating. For example, in groups of three people, each student listened for three minutes, followed by one minute of silence, then the next person spoke for three minutes, and so on. The key was to *pause*. In that minute before it was the next person's turn to talk is when the magic happened. While anecdotal, some of the feedback was that they felt uncomfortable at first, particularly during the minute of silence. During the minute, they also realized that prior to the exercise, they tended to jump into response mode, without paying attention to what the other person had said. The minute allowed them to pause and to notice from which level of listening they were operating from and to be in presence. After that, it was easier to remind students to apply listening skills when doing group work without further specific guidance or the need to do a minute of silence.

Another way of pausing is exercising mindfulness. During the course, we drew from different sources to contemplate and understand awareness. *Dadirri*, is to listen deeply and connect, said Aboriginal Elder Miriam Rose Ungunmerr (2017a). It means contemplation and it is a way of life. It is about living versus conceptualizing what it means cognitively. Those descriptions, however, do not translate the lived experience of imagination. Judy Atkinson put into words that *Dadirri* gathers information in quiet observation and deep listening, building knowledge through awareness and contemplation or reflection, which informs action (2002, p. 18). In *Dadirri*, learning is an embodied experience, Ungunmerr (1988, p. 2) reminds us that listening and waiting are key, but also enable us to act.

It was challenging to redesign the course with new resources from literature that are often perceived as meta-philosophy or mystical, and to include additional resources that were not literate. For this, the assessment also needed to open the space for other ways of communication and other ways of knowing—as a basis for the expression to be accepted. Social Science in Universities have predominantly praised the essay. Yet, to answer the assessment on their personal perspective on the meaning of 'peace of mind' requires, as Mueller put it, "being human" (2017, p. 25); being in presence (Scharmer, 2018); and in space-time relation (Hübl, 2020). Trying out a non-linear assessment method added an experiential experiment: to trust the students. It was an opportunity to experiment with an authentic way of being, doing and sensing. In her reflection video, Penny explores how some of the more abstract concepts in the course can be experienced and embodied.

¹¹ The question itself is not relevant to understanding the exercise. The listening exercise was meant to work for a group discussion.

Penny's Reflection: Visualizing Peace of Mind

In an effort to notice new things about the nature of my mind, I designed a video experiment to answer two questions: how do emotions affect peace of mind, and can data visualization and sonification be used as a creative diagnostic tool for self-awareness?

Scribing with my camera, an old piano, and editing software, I set out to conceptualize the relationship between body and mind by mapping the ebb and flow of my emotions back onto the body. If I observe emotions as they arise—rather than suppress or seek alternative feelings—will this observation influence peace of mind and bring about awareness of the totality of experience, and is it valuable to create and view a new perspective of ourselves?

First, I needed data. I set a bell to ring on the hour every hour between 7 am and 10 pm, and for seven days I recorded the character of my experience by charting my personal activities, the events around me, my emotions and their location in the body, the feelings experienced in these emotional states, my peace of mind, and any images that appeared as thoughts in the moment. I then translated this data into an abstract visual and musical language. My peace of mind (P.O.M) was recorded as a number on a scale of one to ten, where one describes less intensity and ten describes more (figure 3). Each emotion was expressed by a different color. For example, happiness—yellow, sadness—blue, fear—grey (figure 2).

I was inspired by Nummenmaa's emBODY tool—an experiment where participants colored in blank body regions to describe the location and movement of emotions in and on the body, forming a map that linked bodily sensation to emotional processing (Nummenmaa, L. et al., 2014). However, in my experiment the human form is realistic, not an outline, and emotionally triggered body sensations appeared as shapeshifting color clouds and graphic images in the region where emotions were felt (figure 4).

To create the soundscape, each number on the peace of mind scale was represented by a different musical chord (figure 3). Emotions that I initially perceived as negative were described as minor chords, and emotions that were perceived as positive became major chords. For example, happiness (+VE) was visualized as a yellow cloud and could be accompanied by a major musical chord like C# major which is high (8) on the P.O.M scale. Whereas fear (-VE) was represented by a purple cloud and might be sonically expressed as a minor chord such as D minor, which is low (2) on the P.O.M scale (figure 2). The melody and rhythm were dictated by the feelings I experienced. The end result was a polyphonic representation of my emotional landscape.

| EMOTION |
|------------|
| Happiness |
| Love |
| Pride |
| Anger |
| Fear |
| Anxiety |
| Shame |
| Disgust |
| Contempt |
| Surprise |
| Envy |
| Sadness |
| Depression |
| Neutral |

Figure 2: Emotion and Corresponding Color: In my experiment, emotion triggered body sensations were recorded as shapeshifting color clouds in the region where emotions were left.

| P.O.M SCALE | -VE EMOTION | +VE EMOTION |
|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 | C Minor | C Major |
| 2 | D Minor | D Major |
| 3 | E Minor | E Major |
| 4 | F Minor | F Major |
| 5 | G Minor | G Major |
| 6 | A Minor | A Major |
| 7 | B Minor | B Major |
| 8 | C \flat Minor | C \sharp Major |
| 9 | D \flat Minor | D \sharp Major |
| 10 | E \flat Minor | E \sharp Major |

Figure 3: Peace of Mind Scale and Corresponding Music Chord: My peace of mind was recorded as a number on a scale of one to ten, where one described less intensity, and ten described more intensity. Each number represented a different chord.

The novelty of data gathering soon gave way to growing dissatisfaction. I rejected feeling depressed and anxious because I believed my efforts would guarantee peace of mind. Instead, I was literally feeling ‘out’ of my mind—outside of the mind. This was a turning point. I expected my experiment to lead to greater peace of mind, but as it plummeted on the scale, hour after hour, I was forced to accept the data, and simply observe without judgment. If my inner state was expressed in a different language (musical and/or visual), would this change how I perceived it?

I made a total of three videos from data collected over seven days in April, 2020. Each video was roughly 40 seconds long. Four seconds of data from Sunday the 5th of April between 1 and 2 pm (00:14 in the video) can be described as follows:

At 1pm, I felt neutral, which was expressed as a green color cloud radiating all over my body, merged with the image of a summery sky. My peace of mind was high, number 9, which was expressed as strong, ascending D major chords on the piano to represent my positive feelings (relaxed, peaceful, satisfied). When my emotion shifted to anxiety, the color cloud changed to bronze fireworks and contracted to cover just my head and torso. My peace of mind had fallen to 6, represented by a minor chord on the piano, A minor. My feelings, (now stirred up and agitated), were expressed in a heavy chord on the piano, waiting to be answered. Next, I felt love. The color cloud changed to pink, expanding to cover my head, torso and arms. My peace of mind lifted to number 8 on the scale, and a corresponding C \sharp major chord was played, but this time it was

sustained (held down on the piano) to express my feelings of compassion and self-forgiveness.

From this new perspective, it was possible to notice that when I'm not mindful, my experience of life is fragmented, and I imagine a gap between body and mind and a similar gap between self and other. This persistent illusion of separation causes psychological discord, perhaps because we experience emotions directly in the body. We think there is separation, yet we feel differently. Language reinforces the sense of I, the sense of a separate self. Visually mapping emotions back onto my body reinforced that I embody emotions. I enjoyed listening to the soundtrack of my feelings and watching the colored energy fields and images flash across my body. When I viewed the data, I felt embarrassed and flawed, but when the data was translated into music and video (figure 4) I embraced the experience. We are conditioned to prefer positive emotions over negative ones, which in turn creates conflict. But if equal attention was given to negative emotions perhaps, they would be less destructive.

In the end, feeling peace of mind did not imply that I would only experience peaceful and positive feelings. It more accurately described my equanimity when it came to receiving and observing the relentless, psychedelic stream of emotions in my life. It was possible to see thoughts, memories, sense perceptions, and emotions as mental activities. For example, "I am happy" became "there is happiness". I could see how the words "I" and "mine", although useful in conventional language, can reinforce the sense of an individualized self that is having an experience. But as I watched the video—without the limitations of words to influence my perception—it was harder to mistake these phenomena for what I am; that process was interrupted. From this new perspective of my inner state, the movement of phenomena (and the patterns they made) was suddenly impersonal. These aspects of the self were revealed as a pattern, rapidly shifting, never fixed, impossible to hold onto. In the color clouds of my video, I was able to see the movement of emotions, and in the piano notes I could hear the unique tones of thoughts, but the self I had initially felt that all of this was happening to was absent. Instead, this self was reidentified as an appearance arising from the movement of these many phenomena in the moment they are experienced.

At this point, I want to acknowledge the incongruity of reflecting from the "I" whilst declaring the lack of a separate, personalized self. To communicate my experience, I have deferred to the rules of conventional language and the normative use of "I". Throughout this reflection, "I" refers to my subjective first-person experience.

The abstract arts can help bring forth that which is unrecognized or unspeakable by scrutinizing the sense of a separate, personalized self. Without words to label an experience we are simply left to identify with the experience itself. My experiment was a creative way to test the borders of this illusion in my lived experience. Recognition of the inner process of peace provides a deeper understanding of its link with outer peace. The world inside is the world outside.

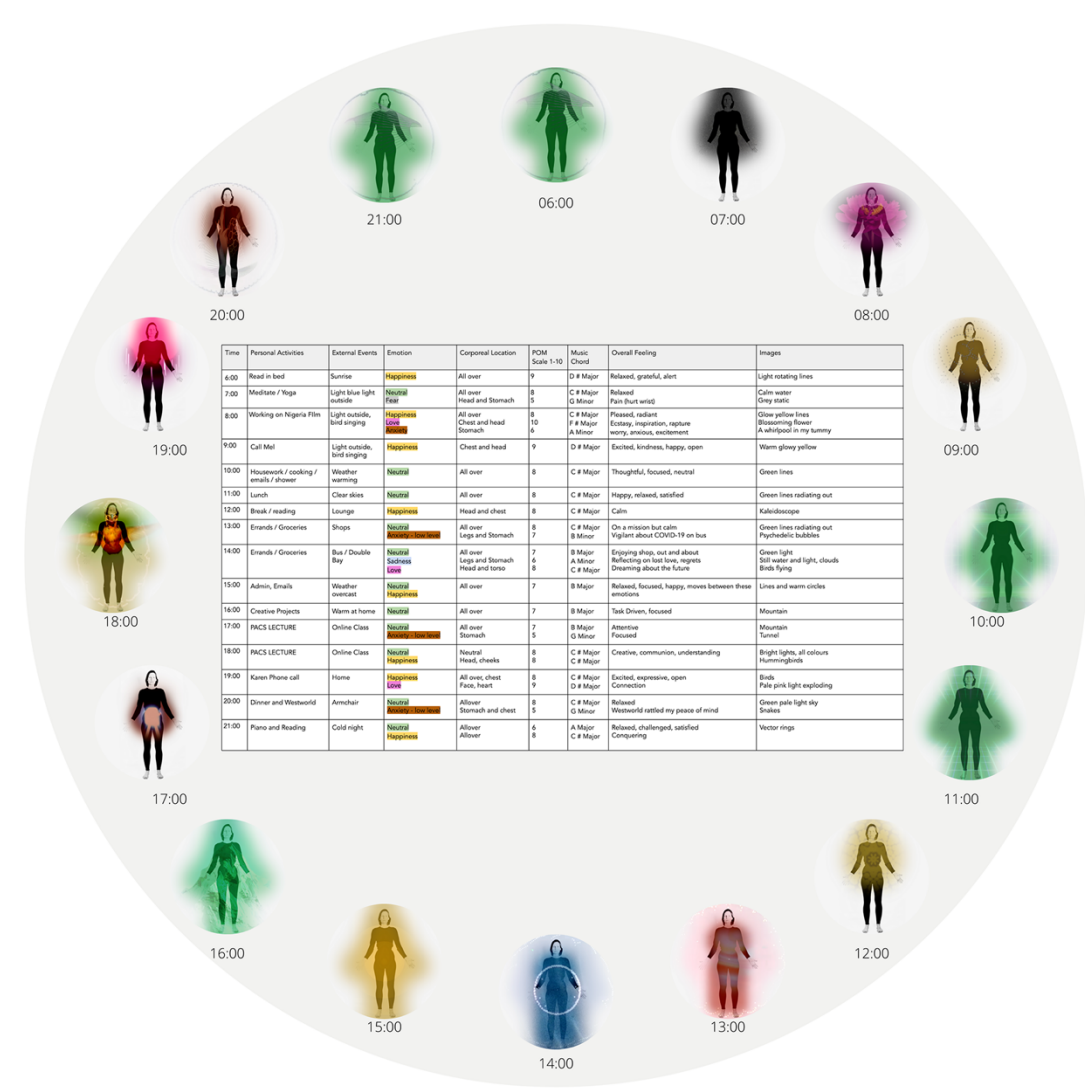


Figure 4: Video stills and Peace of Mind Journal data from April 6th, 2020
(©2020 Penny Vozniak)¹²

¹² The data created from the five-day experiment can be accessed here:
<https://www.pennyvoznia.com/visualising-peace-of-mind-journal>

At the same time, the video that emerged from this data for the assignment is available here:
<https://www.pennyvoznia.com/visualising-peace-of-mind-video>

Human Expression

In pointing out the repression of the self, urged to seek its opposite, there is release: Human expression. How do we originate integration as a sensory experience from the division of the self and discover wholeness? Human expression enables us to experiment.

Throughout the centuries we have had an unconscious hierarchy of both what and how we sense and express sensations. “The senses communicate... without compromising their unity” (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 234), and they express in different ways showing qualities that make each human authentic. Breathing is a way to communicate that we are in existence, and the meaning of our sensations emerge through the body. Bateson describes aesthetics as the response to patterns that connect (Bateson, 1979). Then, experimenting with experiential learning and motions through the different manifestations of aesthetics, parts of the brain are activated. Abstract approaches can enable us to see the manifestation of those connections. The problem then is that mainstream education has prioritized reading and writing, and literate cultures did not develop to integrate human artistic expressions with enough sensitivity to *read a painting*. The human mind could be expressed to a higher potential, where perhaps “the power of reason could transcend the body” (Mueller, 2017, p. 15)—leaving behind Descartes’ legacy to separate the human mind from the world of senses (Mueller, 2017, p. 20). Descartes’ worldview dismissed teaching and learning through lived experience and the senses. “You should not trust your senses” he said to his students, adding that they should ignore the feelings of living creatures, including animals. Known as the Cartesian split of the mind, a resignation to all body sensations implied that certainty was superior (Mueller, 2017, p. 13). Reasoning and the concrete were attributed a higher value in the construction of knowledge. At the same time, nurturing, emotional, and abstract responses were hierarchically conceptualized and embodied as weak.

In his 1844 treatise for artists, Charles Bell recognized the anatomical expression of emotions, “emotion is nothing but the feeling of the reflex bodily effects” (James, 1884, p.194). Art is the expression embodied by the felt sensations; the word *art* in Latin means *Artem*, *by ability* to craft qualities. Andreas Weber said:

The medium for feeling must be emotionally shaped matter. Feeling needs matter like fish need water. Without matter the language feeling could not appear—because feeling would not be there... A work of art is at once matter and meaning. It is the material arrangement of an emotional content by means of the senses (Weber, 2016, p. 124).

As such, we focused on the sensory experience of the encounter. Stephan Harding discovers that there is more to science than analysis, reason and quantities. A moment of encounter is to contemplate qualities (Harding in Angel et al. 2011) that go beyond the intellectual capabilities (Harding, 2017).

This process acknowledges the sensory phenomenon and gives *permission* to the body to become granular and materialize the emotions. Weber refers to Jaak Pansepp on how “our interior being is expressed in one universal language, the lingua franca of the body” (Weber, 2016 p.124). Embodiment is going through a reflective experience to unify the body and the mind (Varela et al., 1993, p. 27). The unconventional assignment was the medium to the students’ reflection.

Safety spaces to witness knowledge emerging from the inner senses are necessary. Porges argues that “only when we are in a calm physiological state can we convey cues of safety to another” (2017, p. 50). It will be challenging then to distinguish between “safety” and “danger” when someone lacks a real sense of inner security (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 119). In programs designed for peacebuilders and changemakers, using disembodied methods to engage with the unseen and human vulnerability is contradictory. Maturana and Varela (1987) said that we are humans because of language, through behavior we generate mechanisms to communicate. “The universal language is an existential meaning conveyed through expressive form. And the form leading to that meaning can be expressed by any number of expressive means” (Weber, 2016, p.125). Humans express! The “bodily process” reveals “many visible, tactile, audible, olfactory and other perceptual dimensions” (Weber, 2016, p. 89). Scharmer, inspired by Rudolf Steiner, states: “Trust your senses, trust your observations, trust your own perception as the fundamental starting point of any investigation” (2016, 31).

Teaching and assessing with different resources such as paintings, scribing, or weaving can be challenging for mainstream higher education. It is a learning curve process in which catching up to access these other intelligences in academia will take time. Yet, in continuing the inspiration with indigeneity culture, the craft (process) is as essential as the art (final piece) produced. Chacon explains that imprints embody the authorship when weavers give body to their creation (2020, p. 64). This paper recognized print-based literacy limitations on embodying the authorship and argues that focusing on crafting expression with complexity beyond authorship is necessary to foster conscious agency.

Conclusion

What if a demonstrated and deep understanding gained from the learning process was assigned an academic value? Wisdom as the meaning of deep understanding is something attained, it is a quality of knowledge that evolves in depth, it is abstract and non-hierarchical. Non-writing modes of expression deserve equal value in academia precisely because they challenge hierarchical thinking. How will peacebuilders and changemakers benefit the vulnerable if their own vulnerability, and their sense of separateness from the world, remains intact and unrecognized?

Breaking the illusion of separation could be the key to ending and restoring the split between mind and body, self and other, human and nature. To know this cognitively is not enough, we must experience and feel it to shift the current paradigm of Western thinking. Failing to recognize the illusion creates conflict

and disturbs inner peace. Albert Einstein recognized humans are part of the whole:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind (Einstein, 1950).

We have to overcome the sense of separation by integrating the abject. Abject can be cathartic (Kristeva, 1982). For this reason, confrontations with the abject, when framed creatively, can serve as potential sites for transformation. The key to enabling embracing processes and attentiveness to the interior condition in relatedness to processes is authenticity. With *trust*, students like Penny were willing to break the hierarchy in ways of expression, experimenting with how they could work intuitively to best address their understanding of the subject—in this case—their inner peace in relation to outer peace. In understanding the split of body and mind, we perceive the hierarchically superior value given to the concrete, the seen, the visible force, and what we believe has certainty. In the symbolic space, there is potential for reflection and transformation. The movement between the real and the symbolic can help break down the boundaries of separation.

This paper argued that *being* a changemaker for a more peaceful and secure world requires us to encounter non-cognitive centric ways of learning in order *to be* vulnerable. Taking an epistemological approach to peace and security is not enough to break the cycles of violence. Lederach proposes to create spaces for inner dialogue and “to-talk-to-ourselves”. A creative and imaginative approach where judgement is suspended, and inquiry emerges. In order to build peace, he suggests that we need “the imagination of risk” because violence is known, and peace is unknown (Lederach, 2005, p. 39). We must learn to embrace the unknown to see ourselves in the terrifying Other—the abject. Otherness emerges from embodied information, a process Ihde’s refers to as “embodiment relation” (Ihde, 1979, p. 9). The abject denies the ability of the I to be in presence. Reducing the abject to only the visual frame creates a safe distance to examine the relationship without fear of the abject “invading our boundaries” (Seegert, 2014, p.11). Penny explored her relationship to the abject in the video experiment:

I was faced with a destabilizing paradox. I created the video as a medium to explore the wholeness of human experience, yet found myself rejecting parts of the process that were too uncomfortable to integrate into the experience, thus reinforcing the split I was attempting to prove was an illusion. But this is precisely how the abject functions, it can be used as a psychic strategy to highlight flawed subjectivity and identity. Untangling and deciphering

paradoxes is the domain of the abject. What is designated as abject decenters the beholder, but fear and retreat are optional. The groundlessness of primal horror can be a signal; a roaring reminder that separation is a collective delusion, the enemy of peace, a limiter in the wholeness of life.

Incorporating experiential teaching and assessment through embodying knowledge, shifted student perception in relation to inner and outer peace. Can a shift in perception mean that someone has transformed? This paper does not sustain that students were transformed or changed from point *a* to point *b*. Transforming students was not part of the purpose. Instead, the aim of redesigning the course was to enable different ways of expression to account for new realities. If students shifted perception or were “transformed,” it is the result of exposure to other methods in teaching, learning and assessing. The assessment demonstrated that experimenting with inner peace is an ongoing process that only exists when expressing (doing) and subject in movement (being) are in relationship to something and not isolated actions. It is an evolving phenomenon and not always perceptible to human eyes. For most students, concluding how inner peace is intrinsically linked to outer peace was genuinely new.

We conclude that higher education needs to value nurturing and emotional responses to enable other expressions to emerge. We argued that painting and weaving in Indigenous cultures contained a vast amount of knowledge, and intuition and embodiment were needed to interpret the information. These *invisible* intelligences were not developed at the same pace as print-based literacy; therefore, students—unless they are art students—lack the sensibility to consciously embody a painting, a textile, a mapping of emotions, or nature. The arts, of course, includes writing as a form of expression, and mixed creative genres such as poetry and music. The argument is not vilifying reading and writing. The point is, education hierarchically defines being literate as having an education, and this is typically embedded within culture, activating *othering*. To what degree is culture subconsciously embodied? Western acculturation established print-based literacy and linear knowledge as ‘certain’ and ‘higher’ human expressions to the other values. As a result, for example, Indigenous oral languages are seen as inferior in the dominant model of Western Education, giving space to reductive labelling, or *othering* as non-literate, non-educated. The result is that in mainstream higher education there is not enough sensibility and *situatedness* to apprehend Indigenous cosmovision. Yet, if we consider the classroom as a space for experimenting with our own transformation, then we are open to exploring complex inner dynamics such as integrating the split (the separation of the self). Consciously embodied sensibility is to be one with the self, the other, and the Earth again.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

The Reflexible Person:

Toward an Epistemological Learning Culture

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Abstract

Referring to the European and especially the German education system, this article first identifies that both forms of governance in educational systems as well as pedagogical professionalization have fallen behind. We present new proposals for a substantive and evidence-based reinterpretation and reshaping of what education is and can be and how educational systems can be changed. In order to address these shortcomings, we follow suggestions of a systemic-constructivist pedagogy, and highlight concrete strategies, and starting points of an awareness-based system change in the field of educational system development are pointed out. This attempt to not only rethink education, but also to shape it, is based on a critical analysis of the often stagnant internal educational reforms and the concepts and routines that characterize these stagnant reforms. We hypothesize that, in order to break free from this stagnation, a continuous self-transforming subjectivity of the responsible actors is necessary. This explanatory framework is extended in this article to the figure

of the “reflexible person” (Arnold, 2019a), whose main characteristic is reflexivity, in the sense of being reflexive as well as flexible. The reflexible person possesses practiced and strengthened competencies for observation and reflection including of the self, as well as reinterpretation and transformation. These competences are substantiated and specified as prerequisites and effective conditions for an awareness-based system change in educational systems. In addition, possible ways of promoting and developing them are pointed out.

Keywords

vocational education; vocational training; learning culture; self-awareness; self-reflection; personality development

Introduction

This article is both analytical and programmatic. We begin with the evident processes of change in the labor market and in society, which have led to changed expectations of the education systems of modern societies. These expectations are illustrated by the example of European—especially German—education policy.

New policies:

- found their early expression beginning in 1987 in efforts to improve vocational education and training (VET), the possibilities and effects of which were tested and researched in state-funded pilot projects (see, e.g., Staudt, 1993);
- led to redefining the concept of education in Germany’s first national education report in 2006, which identified individual regulatory competence as the primary concern of education (Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006);
- became binding through the European Qualifications Framework of 2008, which mandated that national education systems develop competences for meeting new (!) demands (European Parliament Council, 2008); and
- are also reflected in memoranda of German employers and employers’ associations, which promote an expanded understanding of education that encompasses more than professional competence (e.g., VAW, 2015).

The programmatic nature of the argument presented here results from our impression that these expectations of the education systems have not yet been reflected in new governance forms (e.g., school development, pedagogical leadership), and pedagogical professionalization (e.g., teacher training) on a broad scale. We assume that the delays are the result of vain attempts to understand, judge, and shape the future of education using the concepts and explanations of the past.

In this paper, we make new proposals for a substantive and evidence-based reinterpretation and reshaping of what education is and can be. We also discuss whether education systems are in fact capable of being changed. In doing so, we follow the suggestions of a *systemic-constructivist pedagogy* (e.g., Arnold & Siebert, 1995; Marlowe & Page, 1998; Reich, 1996), which in recent decades has increasingly developed into a science of the self-organization of the systemic at the individual, organizational, and societal levels (e.g., Arnold, 2015, 2017; Bagnall & Hodge, 2018; Boyer et al., 2014; Siebert, 2017). These proposals arise from our own research and experiments in processes of systemic change at the levels mentioned.¹ *For the first time*, they highlight concrete strategies and starting points of awareness-based system change in the field of educational systems.

This attempt not only to rethink education, but also to shape it, is based on a critical analysis of internal educational reform and its concepts and routines (point 1 below). It spells out the need for new subjectivity, or *flexibility*, by the responsible actors, as described by Richard Sennett (1998), among others. This explanatory framework is extended here to the figure of the “reflexible person” (Arnold, 2019a, p. 2ff.) (point 2 below). The *reflexible person* has strengthened and renewed competences that include the ability for an observation that includes the self (thereafter named as self-included observation), reflection, reinterpretation, and reimagining. In this paper these competences will be positioned as prerequisites for an awareness-based transformation of educational systems. Furthermore, we will identify possible ways of promoting and developing these competences (point 3).

The education systems we focus on here are the general vocational education systems, as well as higher education. In these systems, the aforementioned concerns about change and education policy have been debated repeatedly over the past 20 years, without, however, producing any sustainable systemic change.

Innovation and Stagnation

Amongst the main concerns and tasks of educational institutions in modern societies is to anticipate future demands on society and to that end develop training and education program in the present moment, that serve to prepare current students to meet these anticipated future demands (Billett, 2011; Sylte, 2020). The pedagogical considerations placed on these programs therefore focus on the future and the assumed ways it relates to the present. But in times which are characterized by a steady increase in knowledge, and by a trend in which innovations are increasingly shaped by disruptive solutions, it becomes increasingly challenging for the systems of economy and education alike to try to

¹ Our research took place in educational settings in Colombia, Honduras, Bosnia, Luxembourg, and Belgium, as well as in company personnel development, management training, and teacher training.

predict future requirements of economy and society *and* to derive curricular specifications out of these.

These tendencies fundamentally challenge traditional notions of education, since the supposedly safe ground of what once was seen as professionally unambiguous and necessary in itself is now subject to erosion. At the same time one can discern both professionalization and de-professionalization, which recalibrate the actions of teachers and learners (Maclean & Wilson, 2009; Siebert et al., 2018) and overcome the focus on the individual. In a digitally connected world, one can no longer expect all competencies to be concentrated in one person.

Instead, networks of people with different specializations and competitive advantages are expected. Both individuals and organizations must learn to deal with unpredictability, openness, and uncertainty about the future. In addition to technical and behavioral competences, personality development that strengthens the resilience of individuals is becoming increasingly relevant. The question of how to promote and develop self-learning competences, as well as skills of self-reflection and self-transformation, will become more relevant for future education systems.

In recent years, the educational sciences, above all systemic-constructivist pedagogy, have turned to questions about the possibilities and limits of awareness-based change in individuals, groups, organizations and societies. In doing so, they have increasingly considered the assumption that targeted interventions in established structures of habit and certainty are hardly possible. Since cognition and emotion are understood and described as relatively closed autopoietic systems, changes to these systems can only be initiated as processes of self-transformation (Dekkers, 2017; Thompson, 2007).

While such a self-transformation can be stimulated, facilitated and accompanied, its effects cannot be guaranteed (Arnold, 2019b). Nonetheless, it is possible to observe and get a felt sense of the inner interrelationships of these transformative processes. Also, one can increase the probability of leading to effects through resonant forms of engagement and facilitation (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; McKee et al., 2008; Rosa, 2019). Such a systemic view of things is oriented toward outcomes, i.e., *observing impact* and *using resonance*. In simple terms we are referring with the latter to the abilities of connecting with others, understanding their desires and helping them to enhance their capacities (McKee et al., 2008). At the same time, the pedagogical discourse has begun to move away from naive hopes of the efficacy of intervention as well as from linear-mechanistic concepts of instruction. Instead it shifted toward trying out pedagogical forms that enable (rather than produce or even force) the expected and desired development of competencies as processes of a self-organized maturation of systems (e.g., Brater, 2020; Morris, 2019a).

The didactical implications of this paradigm shift are fundamental: In learning, the formerly dominant role of teaching is moved to the margins, while a view on the competence-building effect of learning processes that are largely self-

organized comes into focus (Arnold, 2019a; Morris, 2019b). The same applies to concepts of didactics: curricular didactics is partially lost and is partially replaced by what Arnold and Schön (2019) frame as enabling didactics. In the process, notions of a first-order identity and competence development have evolved into notions of second-order learning (Arnold, 2021)—hence in today’s education the focus is no longer primarily and exclusively on learning about something (first-order learning), but on learning to learn and to optimize the sustainability of what has been learned (second-order learning).

Learning thereby becomes the primary vehicle for personality formation, the core of which involve the abilities to reorient and to change oneself as well as to take responsibility for one’s own learning process. At the same time, the rootedness of identity and competence development in deep emotions is given greater consideration. Also, it is recognized that new forms of pedagogical professionalism are necessary to initiate, accompany, and shape the transformation of emotional-cognitive certainties and routines in resonant ways.

This paradigm shift is clearly shaping research and theory formation in European and especially German-language pedagogical discourse (Brater, 2020; Siebert, 2017; Sloane, 2020). In our opinion, the urgently needed implementation of this paradigm shift in schools, companies, adult education institutions and universities has only just begun. The evidence of pedagogical research (e.g., on the provable interactions between teaching and learning or the ineffectiveness of educational interventions in general), in many places gets lost due to traditional and habitualized pedagogical certainties. From an awareness-based systems change perspective we assume, that these (supposed) certainties can only be effectively tackled with *fresh thinking*—to reach “a deeper source of creativity” (Scharmer, 2009, p.34)—as well as through the strengthening of forms of professionalism that includes the self on the part of the responsible actors (especially leadership and teaching staff) in educational institutions.

From Flexibility to Reflexibility

The first step in *fresh thinking* about education systems and their transformation is to examine and develop a contemporary theory about the function that a socially responsible education should and can fulfill. In this context, “contemporary” marks a benchmark in how far the aforementioned insights into the complex interrelationships of effects in the learning processes of identity and competence development are being considered. The same applies to the goals that education should and can serve. As already mentioned, education—according to the expectations documented at the beginning—should contribute toward strengthening an individual’s ability to self-regulate and enable him or her to successfully cope with new and unforeseen demands. In such competence requirements, the basic subject qualities of flexibility, already described in Sennett’s conception of the “flexible man” (1998), find their expression.

In our opinion, the concept of Sennett’s *flexible person* is of central importance, but at the same time—according to our proposition—it only

imperfectly considers the core of the competence dimensions that are increasingly coming into focus. As outlined in the book *Escape from Teaching* (Arnold 2019a, p. 2 ff.), the changing demands of the new, the unexpected and the disruptive require of people not only “flexibility” (in the sense of openness to change), but also “reflexivity” (in the sense of recognizing and stepping out of familiar patterns of thinking, feeling and acting)—put in one newly created word: “reflexibility” (accompanied by the artificial adjective “reflexible”). The expectation of flexibility on the actors is thereby extended by a dimension that ultimately has to be seen as being epistemological at its core, in which the actor is aware of the self-fulfilling power of his habits of perception and thinking as well as how he or she is internally tied to traditions and routine. The reflexive person knows that these ties always tempt him or her to cling to his certainties and to construct the future based on his own experiences, thus contributing to the future remaining more or less as the past has been.

Not infrequently, this attitude leads the actor to actually miss out on the manifold possibilities the open future holds, due to the holding on to images from the past. In view of spectacular company collapses, as in the case of Kodak or Nokia, or far-reaching environmental scandals, as in the case of the VW Group, many companies today are asking themselves whether they really employ the right specialists and managers. When selecting them, do they only honor adapted or expected thinking and acting, or do they also value deviating or even pattern-breaking potential? How important are moral conduct and social responsibility? Ultimately, the central problem is: How can modern societies ensure not only that their professional and managerial staff imagine the world in the way they have learned, but also that they themselves are the ones who repeatedly question previous solutions? However, it is not only professionals and managers who are expected to be more reflexible. In general, in view of the climate crisis and globalization, modern societies are increasingly confronted with the need to sustainably transform previous ways of thinking and living—a need that comes with very personal consequences for the way people think, feel and act.

The consequences for the educational institutions of modern societies are fundamental. They are required to rethink the offerings and forms of their education. The key question is how learners can be prepared for a future that is open and whose requirements cannot be adequately described simply by projecting what has gone before. So far, educational theory and policy have reacted rather cautiously and with partial corrections. There is talk of, among other things, a clearer focus on developing “self-sharpening qualifications” (Bauerdick et al., 1993, p. 114) or strengthening key *competencies* that enable people to deal successfully with new demands of any kind when they encounter them (Arnold, 2020).

As Brater (2020) notes, for example, one can clearly see how today, in many places, the demands of the world of life and work are turning into demands for the free development of the personality. Accordingly—he argues—any vocational preparation, precisely because it is oriented toward the demands of the world of

work, must increasingly become a *general personality education*. Schools, universities, companies, and educational institutions of all kinds are thus transforming themselves into *competence centers* for dealing with constructions of reality. Therefore, these institutions need in-house “experts of not-knowing”, i.e., experts who understand a lot about identity, personality and competence development, but who can suppress this knowledge in order not to make inappropriate diagnoses or intervene hastily with their own expertise trying to ‘get it right’. The learners must not be deprived of the necessary emotionalizing moment of successfully designing and solving problems by and for themselves. Education can thus become a process of *competence and identity formation* (Arnold, 2019b), which initiates, enables and accompanies the comprehensive personality development of the learners.

Also, the scientific observation and description of these changing forms of education is facing a fundamental turn, for which preliminary work is only available in the context of systemic pedagogy and competence didactics. These disciplines are concerned with the question of how reflecting about and transforming biographically acquired patterns of interpretation can be initiated and shaped, since self-organizing systems always decide for themselves what becomes of the well-meant and professionally contributed impulses that are addressed upon them. Pedagogy as a discipline must therefore increasingly detach itself from an input based conception of education toward a lifespan and change science. Its primary knowledge interest thus lies in gaining a deeper understanding of the self-organization of subjects in their biographical and lifeworld-related embeddedness. On a practical side it is therefore searching for ways of lifting current patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting into the awareness of learners and how to accompany learners in making newly acquired interpretation options a reality. This is because the abilities to construct, reinterpret, and reshape knowledge in Piaget’s sense of accommodation (Piaget, 1964), or in the sense of transformative learning in adulthood (Kegan, 2000), form the very core of lifelong learning, that both prepares subjects for change as well as empowers them to deal with that change in appropriate and successful ways (Arnold, 2021; Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). Personality development understood in that way can be defined as the ability to perform *self-reflection* and *dispassionate examination*, as well as *reflexive, socially embedded, and resonant action* (Arnold, 2020).

Personality Development Is Self-development— Self-development Is Awareness Development

Personality development is self-education in a twofold sense: On the one hand personality development emerges from a willingness and movement within the learner; it cannot be triggered in its depth from the outside by didactic inputs. On the other hand, the object of learning for the learner is his or her own self. It is his or her forms of self-expression, his or her preferred ways of thinking, feeling and acting, which he or she chooses or avoids to examine and, if

necessary, engage with in different ways to be both in and with the world. As a consequence, he or she is able to increase the number of possibilities for action he or she has at his or her disposal. This movement, at the same time, also has to be understood as development of awareness.

Learners who engage in this form of education about themselves, are able to imagine the future in different ways than how their own experiences and accumulated knowledge might spontaneously suggest to them. Repeatedly, it is their reflexible abilities that lead them into a loop of reflection coupled with a parallel effort to make one's supposedly familiar world to appear *anew*, that is, with new potentials previously hidden from one's perspective (Arnold, 2019a). This dimension of a reflexible form of personality development builds on epistemological considerations; in itself it has to be understood as an applied epistemology. In this way, it follows the suggestions of the Chilean neurobiologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, who as early as the 1970s/80s have positioned people's ways of conceptualizing reality and perceptual routines as representing the main concern when focusing on change and in doing so plead for strengthening abilities for a *self-included* observation and reflection (e.g., Maturana, 1978; Maturana & Varela, 1980).

In their work, Maturana and Varela assumed that not only our perception and cognition but also our states of consciousness are merely the result and expression of the senses and brain functions, as well as the biographically acquired patterns of emotion and interpretation (Varela et al., 2016). According to Metzinger (2009), consciousness has a tunnel-like character that allows people to see only what they already 'know', anticipate or fear, and therefore to constantly repeat their lives. However, they can escape this *ego tunnel*, as Metzinger calls it, through "self-included reflection"—such were the hopes of Francisco Varela (Varela et al., 2016, p. 28). Whether, how and in which direction a permanent further development of this "accidental equipment" of humans is possible, and whether a sustainable change in consciousness can be attained via the path of self-included education, is one of the core questions of the still emerging field of consciousness research.

This kind of self-included education detaches itself from the question of *what* the topic or task is and essentially turns to the question of *how* one is accustomed to *interpreting* and *thinking about* the events and which possibilities are seen or overlooked in the process (Arnold, 2014)—a change of perspective that has also been strongly advocated by Peter Senge, among others (Senge et al., 2005, 2008). Presence and mindfulness are seen as core elements of any formative competence in dealing with the unpredictable, as is now empirically supported by numerous studies (e.g., Feuerborn & Gueldner, 2019; Reb et al., 2014; Rupperecht et al., 2019). In order to promote presence and mindfulness, educational offerings (e.g., leadership qualification or higher education) are turning much more to the possibilities of *identity learning*, which leads participants in biographical and thematic search movements for guided self-reflection (Dybbroe, 2012; Illiff et al., 2019; Illeris, 2014). Mindfulness training is also experiencing a significant

upsurge in the commercial education market (Forbes, 2019). American universities have been engaged in contemplative training of their students for decades (Astin et al., 2011; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014); recent social science concepts place mindfulness-based social change practices at the center of thinking about how individuals, organizations and societies can change sustainably (Bockler, 2021).

At the same time, in the context of accelerated and, in many areas, disruptive pushes of modernization (Rosa, 2019), the question gains importance as to whether succeeding in leading a good life in times of change does not depend precisely on being able to take into account and extend previously entrenched forms of observing, interpreting, so as to judge with new or “fresh” forms of reality construction that open up further perspectives. Even if at first there seems to be little to support these new constructions of the future, they can become more and more real if they are consciously focused on, visualized and emphatically practiced. In this sense, Scharmer (2018), for example, speaks of a type of learning that operates from the future—desired, possible or ideal—of the individual, a group, organization or society that wants to or could emerge: Presencing.

Such a development of awareness is not only *radically subject-oriented*, it *also* follows the above-mentioned concept of *second-order learning*. The focus is on the ways in which individual learners appropriate their learning and whilst doing so which of their typical peculiarities are revealed and repeated. The learning practices of the self are at the center of attention: the self’s own awareness of itself and the world. It is also about strengthening the insight that this awareness, as it is, is neither right nor wrong—but that it determines and places boundaries upon the subject, can be predicted, closes off new perspectives and (mis-)leads to inappropriate actions. Such a development of awareness follows the contingent principle that ‘it could also be completely different’ and knows the limitations of self-formation and transformation: Awareness is ultimately only a well-cleaned pair of glasses through which we look at the world—but we can never replace these glasses themselves (Eckoldt, 2017). Nevertheless, over time, people think, feel and act more mindfully and, in many cases, more tolerantly toward themselves and the world if they remain deeply aware of the fact that they too are only capable of looking at the world through their glasses. They learn that they are not able to recognize the world as it is, but only as they themselves are or have become.

Awareness development can nonetheless save us from what we call common awareness traps. These kinds of traps show up when people:

- want to vehemently cling to their habitual ways of feeling and acting about themselves and the world at all costs—even in the face of evidence-based arguments;
- surround themselves with like-minded people in their everyday contexts, modes of information and preferred paths of discourse, or avoid foreign and unsettling contexts;

- hope that scientific ways of knowing and recognizing can also prepare us to develop more effective skills for successfully dealing with highly emotional or destructive experience and/or situations—such an understanding too must be seen as an abridged reading of the adult educational claim to enlightenment;
- implicitly assume that their conscious ways of thinking, representing and judging can connect them to a ‘true’ reality and that this reality also holds evident to others with similar persuasive power. The ‘illusion of conscious thought’ (Carruthers, 2017, p. 228) is unfamiliar to these people.

Awareness development sensitizes people to these everyday threats and supports learners in their search for a strengthening of an inner core which does not have “let us keep up” within its repertoire. A mindset where everything must always be done the same way, just because it has always been done that way, is alien to these learners. Already the simple notion of “keep it up” raises questions about one’s own awareness: What do I want to keep up in dealing with myself and the world, and what do I want to change in the time I have left? In what direction do I want to mature? When do I live consciously, and when am I stuck in repetitions or in forms of thinking, feeling and acting that have nothing or little to do with the current situation and the world around me? How can I interpret and interact more freshly and effectively in shaping a common future? The development of awareness is the effort to achieve an unemotional observer position from which one’s own self and the world can be recognized or perceived with all possibilities that so far had been in one’s blind spot.

The following example serves as an illustration: Leaders who act reflexively know that their impressions are merely easily comprehensible activities of their mind and are therefore able to swim against their own inner current. They have a *meta-consciousness* at their disposal, that can free them from “the prison of their automatic reactions”, as Siegel (2010) describes it. In order to release the reflexive potential of such a meta-consciousness and to further develop it into a mindful attitude, different paths need to be taken, whose usefulness has so far only been rudimentarily tested, and examined in the context of effective leadership development. These paths would have to follow a four-stage strategy, of which each individual stage are dedicated to different development tasks, as shown in Figure 1.

| Stages | | | Description (Development task) |
|---|---|--|--|
| | | Transformation – or: practicing self-transformation | Striving for an effective synaptic anchoring and automation of the new expressions of the intended ego in regular focus and meditation work. |
| | Self-direction – or: the intended ego | | Being able to develop a clear picture of one's own forms of feeling and being in the world and imagining this in clear pictures. |
| | Emancipation – or: the second-order liberation | | Being able to detach oneself from adopted or brought-along forms of dealing with oneself and others and to allow other possibilities. |
| Brain – or: the little brain science | | | Knowing the transparent mechanisms and workings of our emotion and cognition and how these influence our here-and-now interpretations and reactions. |

Figure 1: The BEST strategy of self-transformation

The movement along the four stages of the so called BEST strategy depicted in Table 1 describe the reflexive process of awareness development. In its course, forms of self-observation and self-reflection are practiced, through which learners are enabled to arrive at a changed attitude toward themselves and the world. In this learning process, leaders do acquire some tools that help them to pause, step back and learn to construct anew. The decisive effect, however, is a competence to relativize their own certainties and to deconstruct familiar truths. They literally trans-form their way of observation: they no longer simply observe external circumstances (e.g., operational processes, decision-making situations, conflicts, etc.), but also observe their own observing (Scharmer, 2001). After some practice, they are increasingly able to notice within their own habits when they, once again, are endangered to fall into repetitive loops in which they routinely interpret the world and do not create an internal space for other possible ways of seeing and evaluating. They realize that they are in the process of *leading from the past* (Scharmer, 2009, 2018) and thereby helping to ensure that the future will become like the past has been.

Heading toward Epistemological Learning Cultures

The question “How do we know what we know?” marks the way to a different culture of observing, judging and interacting in organizations as well as in processes of teaching and learning. The main focus lies on the goal of relating to

each other in more resonant ways and being open to differences and diversity. The aforementioned abilities to deal (re-)flexibly with one's own observations and acts of judgement as well as to change habitual patterns of thinking, being and cooperating are fundamental prerequisites to achieve this goal. They are also at the center of recent discussions around agility as being a foundation for leadership and learning organizations (Arnold, 2021). We argue that agile thinking, feeling and acting should themselves follow a disruptive logic. This means that actors must increasingly practice not always seeing the old in the new, nor wanting to develop the future with the means of the past—and thus missing out on emerging opportunities (Rigby et al., 2020). Companies must constantly question and literally attack themselves disruptively to avoid being surprised by disruptions—or competitors—from the outside. In this context, there is scientific talk of epistemological learning as well as corporate cultures (Langemeyer, 2015).

Epistemological learning and cooperation cultures are based on the inner—ultimately also emotional—capacities of the actors, who decide which changes they aspire to or are confident in and able to endure. Contemporary leadership development therefore offers opportunities for biographical self-reflection and self-transformation (Arnold, 2014), in which the question of how one thinks, feels and acts can be clarified. Only based on such clarifications can *disruptive thinking* emerge (von Mutius, 2017). By this we mean a view of the world and of oneself that is not oriented to standards of the past but to possibilities of the future. Crucial for this are personal—and to a certain extent extra- or supra-disciplinary—key competences (e.g., Brockmann et al., 2011; Weinert, 2001), such as the abilities:

- to change cherished perceptions and routines,
- to communicate and cooperate synergistically,
- to learn in a self-directed manner,
- to independently develop, assess and use sources of knowledge,
- to shape new demands and issues, as well as
- to act in a self-responsible and just manner.

In this context, a sustainable *transformation* of one's own orientations and competencies presupposes that the encounter with other ways of shaping and enduring the world can be designed in emotionally moving and destabilizing ways (e.g., Erpenbeck, 2018; Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2019; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Mälkki, 2019; Morris, 2020; Taylor & Cranton, 2012, 2013). Thereby, value orientations come into play that support the bridging of missing knowledge and help to shape action.

Numerous companies are asking themselves whether and how values and attitudes can be changed and developed (Permantier, 2019), e.g., to allow *disruptive personality types* to mature—a question on which moral pedagogical research of recent decades has already produced some insights. Research in this

mentioned field has shown that people form their supporting value orientations already in the dense emotional experiences of childhood (Teschmer, 2014). These value orientations cannot be changed in later life through information, instruction and discourse or even persuasion. Only in genuine *emotional resonance* in direct encounter—similar to those we had been exposed to in our early lives—can a lasting change in value orientations be triggered (Arnold, 2019a). In order to ensure such an emotional contextualization of change, it is not necessary to address and connect the actors themselves to their own critical life events. Even the idea of upcoming changes (e.g., in the professional role, at work, in the partnership, etc.) can have an emotionalizing effect. In this case, one's own insecurities or fears become the topic (e.g., in case of illness, loss) and the potential shock becomes a connecting point to initiate profound clarifications of values.

At the core of resonant forms of human resource development is a more conscious attitude of employees toward themselves and toward life. Epistemological learning and corporate cultures can develop if trainees, students and employees deal with the following questions at an early stage: “Who am I? What are my most deeply felt values? Do I have a mission or purpose in my life? Why am I in college? What kind of person do I want to become? What kind of world do I want to help create?” (Astin et al., 2011, p. 1).

Interestingly, the very question about the human condition seems to be frighteningly unpopular in contemporary pedagogy. Yet it is precisely the view from the outside—the view from the non-self—that opens up access to explanatory approaches that go beyond our own previously held thought patterns. A large number of North American educators and scholars from a wide range of disciplines support such a transformative perspective and either positioning a contemplative turn or are working to develop contemplative pedagogies (e.g., Astin et al., 2011; Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014; Palmer et al., 2010). For them, the insight is fundamental: that people are not what they think they are, and that they also do not have to remain how they—accidentally (!)—have become through the conditions and peculiarities of their lives. The goal of a contemplative, transformative pedagogy is to foster a mindful, differentiating and formative approach to reality—both of one's internal and the supposed external reality. In particular, the aim is to develop the ability to become clearly aware of one's own subjectivity in the world and to use this awareness without bias (Roth, 2014). With such an attitude—a first-person approach to mindful observing, as we already know it from Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (Husserl, 1931, 1970)—one learns to observe, feel and act differently; one leaves behind both the third-person approach and the object-centered approach of scientific observing.

Such “self-included reflection” (Varela et al., 2016, p. 28) follows Ludwig Wittgenstein's observation that “Because it seems so to me—or to everybody—it does not follow that it is so” (Wittgenstein, 1977, p. 29). Those who practice mindfulness in this way act in the unemotional awareness of how trivial and

transparent their own perceptions, judgments, language and interaction work within them. It becomes clear to the practitioner that people constantly fall short of their possibilities and that often their own lives repeat unreflexive patterns. “Have courage to use your own reason”, Immanuel Kant once declared as a motto of the Enlightenment (Kant, 1784/1963, p. 3), and this invitation could also be applied to breaking open our own entrenched thought patterns in order to reflect on them intentionally and to transform them, if necessary.

The concern of a more contemplative and self-reflexive educational movement is to deepen one’s own or individual access to the world. This involves dimensions of personality and attitude formation that are not new but had already been positioned alongside the material theories of education following Wilhelm von Humboldt (Bruford, 1975). This form of personality education is about strengthening the ego-forces and potentials of the individual, and about promoting well-grounded ways of positioning oneself alongside what life actually means and continuously developing his or her self-education and self-learning competences. A sustainable promotion and development of such competences has less to do with the contents of curricula, study and training regulations than with the emotional imprints and experiences of the individual within his or her own biographical development. The learner can question and break open these imprints through guided and accompanied self-reflection. Such a mindful self-reflexive form of dealing with one’s own ego states (e.g., one’s own parental or professional role, or disengagement) confronts learners with the task of active and anticipatory self-socialization. For them, the new clarification of the ideal Self is a constant task. This becomes a central component of a curative self-care in an agile attitude to life. For this attitude the systemic guiding principle also applies, that externally there can only be possibilities to interpret and endure (one’s own) world drawn from those which have been laid as foundation internally.

Let us illustrate this with another example. Following our explanations above, learners are required in their daily self-care to face the imagination of their personal ideal state—be it as creators of lively encounters or sustainable development processes. This movement can be stimulated and supported by guided meditation, such as that outlined in Figure 2. Our own experience in numerous seminars has shown that guided meditation can lead learners to a radical ego clarification that revolves around the question of who we actually are outside of our habits of thinking and feeling, which we ourselves notice and which we can observe. In doing so, we can gradually arrive at an inner core that senses itself merely as an observer who recognizes itself, recognizes that it recognizes, senses and tries other possibilities, practices to refer itself to this inner core so as not to get caught in cycles of (re-)acting in expected ways. In this movement, we do not “clarify” this ego question conclusively, but we learn to observe how we deal with the question in our lives: using language formulas, being evasive, doubtful, defiant, etc. Agility in this context means being able to leave one’s own universe and being able to move into multiverses—seeking diversity and engaging with it. Taking the step into a distanced observer position

in relation to what one has biographically become and what encompasses one's lifeworld is an achievement that can be compared to Münchhausen's gesture of pulling himself out of the swamp by his own hair. This is a very vivid image, which has already been used in the systemic debate (Watzlawick, 1990).

| Detach yourself from the intention to influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of others and dedicate yourself to your 'inner job'! | |
|---|--|
| Phase | Instruction/question |
| Retrospect | 1. Through which perspectives have I learned to look at and endure the world? |
| | 2. Which guiding distinctions have I learned and adopted before today (e.g., good—evil, just—unjust, living—dead)? |
| | 3. Who set an example for me? |
| | 4. Did I observe other distinctions in others that I did not adopt? |
| Imagination of a new alternative self | 5. I detach myself from my simple guiding distinctions in order to trace the diversity of life. |
| | 6. I develop and follow other guiding distinctions (e.g., development-promoting—development-preventing, appreciative—non-appreciative, dominant—resonant). |
| | 7. I am able to deal with unpleasant or even destructive feelings by repeatedly making it clear to myself that they are merely inside me. |
| Habitualization | 8. I start the day by observing my body and its emotional state and devote myself to it lovingly. |
| | 9. I practice other states of emotion that I learn to call up in myself. |
| | 10. I observe every day how I—preferentially—observe and look self-critically at this routine that only lets be what I know! |
| | 11. I observe more perceptively and pay more attention to the resonance in the other person than to my own ideas. |

Figure 2: Meditation for learners: *My life is (also) daily focus work* (Arnold, 2019c, p. 218).

Ultimately, our own attitudes determine how we deal with knowledge and certainties. Those who lack the ability to be contemplative may be more likely to believe in a worldview of technical controllability and objective truths, while those with contemplative abilities are more likely to seek connection and commonality. Above all, the focus is on the search movement and consensus. You have to be fully aware of the Socratic observation that all you know is that you do not know. Those who recognize that there is no ultimate solution to be found do not freeze in the delusion and paralysis of illusory and supposed certainties, but continue on a mindful search. People are sustained by the connection of their felt identity and plausibility, which is why truly sustainable learning can only succeed if learners can be moved to dense emotional processes of feeling, self-awareness, and self-transformation. The transformation and maturation of competences thus does not require a didacticization, but the emotionalization of what one learns.

Conclusion

Especially in disruptive situations, people use the survival mechanism of human cognition to grasp the new with the help of old and established patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. Initially, they evaluate new possibilities through the lens of the familiar. To some extent, our society is repeatedly threatened by a continuity trap that leads us, even if not intentionally, to believe that everything can and will strictly conserve the way it has always been. Caught in this trap, we are always busy tackling and trying to solve the problems of the future with the same ways of thinking that created these problems in the first place. Only through awareness can the continuity trap be broken.

For an epistemological culture of learning and cooperation in organizations and companies to be developed, an understanding of the circularity, constructiveness, and relativity of one's own perception is essential. A *reflexible attitude* on the part of employees and managers makes it possible to recognize and transform interdependencies. As a result, the share of communication about these processes of transformation also grows in those areas of society whose self-image has so far been more technological. This is accompanied by a cultural break that places new demands not only on the managers involved, but also on professionals and experts.

In order to move forward toward an epistemological learning culture and a self-included professionalism and to design awareness-based system change, we have emphasized the following elements in this paper:

- Education is much more than the accumulation of knowledge and skills. It is first and foremost the targeted promotion of the individual's abilities to reflect and be flexible in dealing with new kinds of demands and solving new kinds of problems. Its guiding principle is the reflexible person.
- Developing education systems requires the targeted development and promotion of the self-education and self-change capacities of the responsible actors. The focus here is on transforming their established certainties (e.g., "Rethink education as competence development!") and strengthening their ability to resonate. The focus is not on teaching and instruction, but on enabling self-organized identity and competence development.
- Education systems must redesign the content of their curriculum and how they present it: It is less about equipping learners with traditional knowledge, skills and abilities than about helping learners develop their personalities and awareness in ways that enable them to adjust their attitudes toward themselves and the world.

- The article identifies the key competences for such change. Using the example of “Meditation for Learners: My life is (also) daily focus work” in Figure 2, it demonstrates how these competences can be self-taught.

These self-competences strengthen the ability of responsible actors to deal with their patterns of thinking and feeling. This ability can help them to think *fresh* (Scharmer, 2009); they can detach from their own biographical imprints and perhaps even reinvent themselves. Free from the whisperings of emotional regimes, time slots, and coaching, individuals have the opportunity to understand themselves as well as the new world and to practice new forms of interaction. In this sense, school, university, and vocational training programs need to become places for reflexive and transformative personal development.

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