

On observation and What Prevents Observation

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I am sharing something I was writing about - how we were observing children in the school and also what prevents observation. When we started the 'reimagining schools initiative' the most important thing we did and asked my group to do was to drop all 'knowledge' we hold on children, learning, subject, content etc. This is not easy as we have to genuinely doubt what we think we know. Is it possible to observe children without wanting to do anything- no teaching, no helping etc. JUST OBSERVE.

This has been very difficult for most people who came to the school to be with us. They all wanted to 'help' children either to play, to see, to learn etc.

This ability to observe without 'knowledge' helps in seeing not only the child but also oneself. The knowledge system I am talking about is fundamentally a two way process which enables one to know oneself as one is engaged in knowing the outer world. Finer, deeper and more sensitive one gets once seeing becomes clearer and clearer. In fact the traditional knowledge system is this kind of knowledge.

Traditional knowledge system must be seen as existential knowledge system in which the sustenance of life is the basis (modern knowledge non-system is whimsical and egoistic). All living beings are rooted in this kind of life-sustaining knowledge.

Once while conducting the workshop 'learning to see' I asked the participants to look for yellow leaves. One engineer participant immediately asked "Oh! The ones without chlorophyll". He obviously will not be able to see as he is full of knowledge and is involved in thinking while looking.

The real act of SEEING is, one could say, merging with the seen. I had always felt if you really see you can only see beauty. There only beauty to be seen but as we don't look we don't see it. We actually have aesthetic cognitive structures which enable us to see clearly and the whole.

The innocence of the child can only be seen once our innocence is awakened. (The issue of objective, subjective knowledge will be a hindrance. The tragedy with the modern knowledge system is that they have developed several rules (traps) to stop them from seeing. Mind will constantly interfere as what modernity has developed is the mind, by way of analytical knowledge. The best example is their exploration in 'embodied knowledge', 'phenomenology' and even in the notion of biological roots of cognition by Humberto Maturana. Once you theorize embodied knowledge then it is no longer embodied knowledge. Phenomenology is a way of knowing by being in process but creating a method of phenomenological investigation the 'process' is finished. I often see very good insights are explained away instead of staying with insight.)

The seed of the bonsai tree has the potential for becoming the original tree. Modernity creates bonsai humanbeings by clipping their roots (fragmentation and alienation). What we do with our children is to make bonsai out of them and not to let it grow to its potential as we think bonsai is its potential. The bonsai tree, pampered and appreciated in rich homes naturally think they are 'evolved' and 'developed'. I see the notion of evolution as another trap modernity has created for itself.

Written by the author on Tue, Jan 6, 2015 and forwarded on several elists.

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See some of his work on <http://whychildrenplay.wordpress.com/dialogue-on-why-what-and-how-children-play-and-make-toys/>