

HOLISM and the "PERSONAL LENS"

by James P. Longo



In a recent Newsweek article by Ashley Merryman and Po Bronson titled "The Creativity Crisis," the authors reveal research that illuminates the decline of creative capacity in Americans. Such dwindling creativity scores, a detriment to cultural sustainability, are attributed in large part, to a deficit of creativity-centered education. Creative education, however, doesn't have to occur solely in art classes. In fact, in order to engage the whole brain, ideas born of the "right brain" must be integrated with functions normally associated with that of the left hemisphere, hence the need for a holistic approach to teaching and learning.

Where development of creativity is concerned, it is important to consider the whole person and our individual differences that create the personal lens through which we see the world. Most misunderstandings occur because of the unique way individuals perceive each moment. It is widely acknowledged, for instance, that a

group of people witnessing a single event cannot agree upon the details of what they saw. We often forget that others do not see things as we do, and take for granted a certain shared view of reality. Even those who realize that individual differences are in play do not understand just how significant those differences might be, especially when it comes to their closest relationships. Acknowledging the existence of this "Personal Lens" opens a pathway to creativity and communication.

Six steps to the process of perception

To best understand how we interpret our perceptions, we can consider six aspects of the dynamic process of perception. They are the cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual, contextual, and communal lenses through which every experience passes. While these six lenses are different in many ways, they are inseparably linked

and interconnected. Fully exploring these lenses would take a lifetime, but we can briefly look at them here.

First, let's consider the cognitive lens. This lens is more than just our intellect. It is the manner in which our unique brains are constructed and perform. Are we individuals with mechanical aptitude, artistic ability, and musical talent, or are we great with languages? Are there areas in which we are more or less capable than others? In either case, each of us is a combination of abilities, talents, and shortcomings. So when the cognitive lens is the primary source of understanding, we are already experiencing a situation with built-in differences, not to mention the differences that evolve over time through variations in education, nutrition and experience.

Next, consider the emotional lens. Emotions are difficult to explain, and we certainly cannot do them justice in this short article. Sometimes they are just a matter of mood or fleeting feeling, other times they are interconnected with the chemicals in our body, or our experiences and expectations. No matter how deep or broad our understanding of our personal emotional makeup, we cannot deny the role that our emotional state plays in the way we see the world or interpret experience. A perception occurs in a moment in time, and our emotional state at that moment forever colors that experience.

The Spiritual lens represents much more than religion. It is an entire belief system. What we believe before an experience occurs will greatly affect the way we will perceive the experience. There is a truism, "seeing is believing." But it would be more accurate to say that believing is seeing, because what we believe or disbelieve controls a good deal of what we are able to

perceive, as well as how we will interpret that perception.

The physical lens prompts considerable debate, even among those of us who adhere to the theory of the personal lenses. Just how much does our physical being contribute to the way we perceive the world around us? If we are physically structured to be an athlete, we likely see the world differently from those who have sustained bodily injuries that have changed them. It could be as simple as living a life in which we are treated differently because of the way we look, or as subtle as having a talent or a challenge that influences how we react to a given situation. Whatever the case, our physical self is an influence upon our interpretation of every experience.

The contextual lens is a bit more abstract. Basically, the culture, time, and place in which we developed—including our gender, age, ethnicity, and economic condition—create a context that influences the way we see our world. We cannot deny that context is a huge influence on

perception and meaning.

The last of the six lenses that interact to create our "Personal Lens" is the communal lens, the most controversial, and the lens most at the cutting edge of thinking today. Being human means most everything is experienced through relationship: our connections and interrelationships mold the way we experience our life; our shared energy makes it impossible to entirely separate from the rest of society. Scientists are making great strides in understanding the energy fields in which we exist. A good deal of who we are is shared with others, and it is relationships and shared energy that influence the way we perceive and experience life.


How the lenses come together

Now we must consider how the lenses interact and balance at any given moment to become our "Personal Lens," remaining aware that the lenses are in constant communication with each other, that they are interacting

and influencing our holistic self at every moment. There might be times that an experience is dominated by our intellect, but the other five lenses are still at play. We are too complex as beings to exclude any of the six lenses from the way we experience life and create meaning from our perceptions.

The importance and application of the concept of personal lens is found not only in understanding ourselves, but also others. Respecting that each of us has these six unique and different lenses, through which we experience life and attribute meaning to experience, is central to a richer and more holistic life. It is also essential in understanding creativity as a function of the individual. We must therefore apply this perspective as we approach teaching, learning or our relationships with others.

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