

Thinking as One

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Thinking as one can have a negative connotation, where groups of people are brainwashed. I don't mean that. This is a story of students who found a positive way. Natalie, Maya, Riley, Emmy, and Ali know how to allow themselves to "*think as one*". They can arrive at a basic level of an *intuitive state of mind*: listening and watching and waiting. By 'basic intuitive', I mean that they listen to each other without jumping to conclusions and analyzing what is meant. They can stay quiet outwardly and inwardly, giving their mind to the person who is speaking. Therefore, they can think as a group, intuitively getting the sense of what the group feels and thinks.

Natalie (15 years old), Maya (13 years old), Riley (12 years old), and Emmy (10 years old) were my neighbors. They were homeschooled children. I pitched in with their homeschooling in math and science. One day, we were practicing math, which led to money arithmetic, which led to buying and selling, which led to business. So, we started a 'company'. It was named "Cookie Mountain". We lived on a mountain and decided to sell cookies to raise money so that we could take a class trip to the Fun Depot, a local amusement park. I taught the girls how to take out a bank loan (I was the bank). We researched recipes and ingredients and decided that we needed \$60.00 for a bake sale. We learned to create a spreadsheet to keep track of our costs and profits. I showed the girls what a bottom line was. Then we wrote a school letter on letterhead asking for a donation of \$50.00 for ingredients. We went to several stores with our letter. The girls felt too shy and inexperienced to ask for a donation, so I approached the management of each store - more on this in a moment. One store gave us a \$50.00 donation in the form of a debit card to be used in their establishment. Suffice it to say that, armed with money for ingredients, we were on a mission! We had two bake sales and made \$110, enough money for the whole Cookie Mountain company to take its employees to the Fun Depot and donate \$5.00 to charity. All in all it was a great success.

The whole process from the inception of Cookie Mountain to the class trip to Fun Depot took a couple of months. We met for class three days a week and also had lessons in science, Spanish, music, and carpentry - with side trips to the local potter, glass

blowers, saw mill, blacksmith, and donut shop. But what is my point in telling this story? I wish to address the issue of reviving “the ancient capability of intuition”. You see, while I taught the girls subject matter, they taught me a new level of listening and observing. They could pay attention in a way that seemed to be largely right brain, using the intuitive ability to receive without being hindered by the egotism of their own thoughts. It wasn't that they didn't know what they thought. They simply could stay attentive to whatever they were observing.

These girls were strong individuals, but not in a way that made them more selfish or competitive. I watched as they grew in a strong version of individuality, learning math, business, and social group relations from our homeschool experiences. You see, we did everything as a group; but in so doing, we relied on each other to individually pull one's own weight. We needed Riley to be responsible for the spreadsheet and watch our bottom line. While Natalie crunched number estimates of costs, Maya researched products on the web. Emmy produced Cookie Mountain labels. As a group, thinking as one, we planned, discussed, then executed the recipes for the no-bake chocolate and peanut butter cookies and the rice crispy treats. Then came the shopping, cooking, and finally, the two sidewalk bake sales. I was in the middle of the whole thing, but so were the children. And remember the several times I had to approach the management of the stores to ask for a donation, while the girls observed me? Well, the girls benefited twice from that. It was a little difficult for me, because I was not used to asking for money. But it was even more difficult for the girls. Therefore, we all discussed how we would send me in to request donations. They watched while I did the talking; then we de-briefed each one of those encounters, deciding if we should do it a little different the next time. I believe that the girls benefited first from being co-designers of the donation process. Then, I believe they benefited a second time by getting even stronger at observation by listening, watching, and waiting. They stood on the sidelines when I went in; then they discussed with me how it went, why it did or didn't work, and how we should send me in the next time.

I think most educators today miss something that I am trying to point out in this story. I don't blame them. It's a subtle point. When the girls listened and watched and waited while I asked for donations, some teachers today might say that they were in a seemingly passive state. But there is a critical point here, about *attention* - active

attention. I think attention can be a capacity to truly *receive*. This may be neglected in schools because we teachers are so pressured to raise test scores. I don't agree that the girls were passive. I think that they were actually quite active, though to some (perhaps many educators today) it would look as if they weren't doing anything. That's the problem. They were most definitely acting and learning. They were in a right-brain, intuitive state of observing the whole situation. The problem is that our *left-brainness* recognizes competition and aggressively taking care of oneself; but it is slow to see the social intelligence of watching the others in a group as if we were a team. I believe that there were at least two social benefits: 1) individually giving full attention to what was happening and 2) being genuinely attentive to each other's responses. They were not competing for credit or praise.

Observing is an extremely important and very active deed. It takes effort. To observe you must stop your own thoughts, your desires, your own idea of what should be happening. Being in a state of observation, you can't be spoiled or self-centered. In observing someone or something you intuitively give yourself *to the other*. This act of honest, open, observation of the whole picture is the epitome of the first step in the scientific method. In the distant past, children could listen to a teacher much longer. There was an unspoken pact between teacher and student. The pact said, "teachers: you will tell stories, and students: you will listen". And the teacher had unspoken guidelines: the stories needed to be developmentally appropriate - they needed to speak to the children where they lived; they were supposed to express real wisdom. And the teacher knew the guidelines and told the stories instead of just reading them to the class.

The next version of humanity needs to be encouraged in this. We need to know that this kind of attention is possible, at whatever age, if only it is cultivated in the right way. We need to remember that this act of truly observing is a strong move - not a passive one. The homeschool girls knew this. Each girl grew in her own individual strength as she let me go in for the donation. It was a power move for each of them to give me attention as I lectured them on how to run a business. And I modeled true collaboration by working side by side with them as we all learned how to run our company by the seat of our pants. Sure, we each put in personal ideas, but we all listened in the spirit of consensus as opposed to debate. Rather than advocating for our own ideas,

we listened for the sense of the group. I believe this form of group thinking is the stuff of emotional intelligence.

Also, there was great value in having an adult as part of this group. Letting any authoritative figure be an equal part of the whole, provides the opportunity to exercise true group consciousness. If the authority is not just asserting his or her own ideas, simply because he or she is the authority, a door is opened for the group to take the next evolutionary step of humankind – *to think as one*. This next-version-authority is not just the coach - oh no - he or she is much more. He moves fluidly among observing, doing some of the work, and guiding. Actually, with Natalie, Maya, Riley, Emmy, and me, each person in this group was in command at different times, according to which one knew something required in the moment. We all tried to sense the best idea or the next task that needed to be done. Many times, one of us saw when to give a hand to the other and finished her task or her sentence. So, I was *on* the team, in addition to being the head of the team. At times I acted as an equal member, but I led more of the time than the students did, because I had more experience. I also had a leadership role in establishing and facilitating this whole way of working together. Without my understanding of this dynamic and my determination to maintain it – it might not have happened. I believe that this form of group thinking is the behavior that transcends the old authoritarian, analytical, egotistical version of humanity. It is a whole-brain, balanced approach. I think that the next version of humanity will form groups of all ages, listening to each other, each contributing what he or she rightfully has to offer. I think humanity is ready for this next step.

While I was preparing the girls for the launching of our company, Cookie Mountain, I told them a story. "37 years ago," I said, "I built a pretend company with my son, Doug and the two neighbors: Ali and Greg. We car-pooled to school for a 45 minute ride every day. To pass the time, we dreamt up a company that would paint a beach cabana for \$100, enough to go to the Great Adventure amusement park. We planned it for months, then actually painted the cabana. By summer, we took a weekend to go to the amusement park. We all collaborated - just like you - on the plans and on the work. It was as if we were one person - just like you!" Natalie, Maya, Riley, and Emmy loved this story. It actually went on quite a bit longer, and they asked many questions. It inspired

our planning for Cookie Mountain. They really knew how to listen intently to stories. You see, they were homeschooled. They were not tainted by the educational system that makes you listen for personal gain. If you could have been there, you would have seen that they did not lightly listen, watching for important keywords that would be on the next test. They didn't look out for themselves. They gave themselves to you. They were present - in what I call the intuitive state - much of the time. So, I told them the story of Doug and Ali and Greg. By coincidence, that very week, Ali (now, 51 years old) came to my town for the first time in twenty years. She called spontaneously one night, so my wife and I quickly drove into town to meet her. As I saw Ali outside The Jack of the Wood pub, we rushed toward each other. After some heartfelt hugs and warm, warm smiles, she introduced us to her friend and excitedly summarized our friendship.

"This man changed my life ... when I was twelve ... with his son and my brother ... we worked out a plan to go to this amusement park ... by earning our own way." Then she turned toward me and finished, "But the best part of it was that you were right there with us ... We did it all together! ... You even painted the cabana with us ... We did it together ... then we went to the park together ... It was like we were one person ... Really, it changed my life!"