

Episode 1

Milton Erickson was a remarkable observer of subtleties of being human, and could tell many things about a person at first meeting. For example, he could tell whether or not a person was prone to procrastination by looking at an item of the person's clothing - do you know how he could tell? We'll get to check that at the end of this column.

Hello & Welcome to the inaugural edition of Observer's Lookout!, a blog we anticipate will occur regularly in your Global Multiversity newsletter.

I'm Peter Thorneycroft, based in Melbourne, Australia. I've been a psychologist since 1976, hypnotherapist since 1986, and Ontological coach since 1994.

With each column of the Observer's Lookout, we are wanting to share a couple of ideas and/or experiential exercises in order to learn to develop sensitivities in our observing, such that we can become keen observers, more perceptive and discerning in our interactions with others. With more acute observations, we are more readily able to enhance options, providing more practical and powerful possibilities for action.

MHE said "the 3 most important things in therapy are to Observe, Observe, and Observe". And, so, in the Observer's Lookout! we shall in part be exploring what he meant by this.

We could also say that observing is also a key component not only in therapy, but also an essential component of effective living in general.

We are able to observe and learn through our process of making distinctions, that is, distinguishing something from something else. When my eldest daughter was very young, perhaps at just-walking-age, there was a full moon. I carried her outside so we could look at the moon together. I said to her "Kaitlyn, look at the moon, isn't it beautiful, isn't it wonderful?" She replied "What's a moon Daddy?" I had to get her to look along my arm and hand and to where my finger was pointing - directly at the moon. "Look, there, the moon is that big round ball that I'm pointing to." She was then able to see what she could not see previously - she was now able to distinguish the moon. Her face beamed with delight, bathed in the soft and full moonlight, as she said "oooh, that's lovely!". Now that she had learnt to distinguish the full moon, it appeared for her in such a way that it was a challenge to not notice it from then on! Additionally we know from the work of Humberto Maturana and other "Brain Plasticity" research experts these days that the learning Kaitlyn had from that experience had altered her neural connections and brain structure, such that she can now see the moon effortlessly forevermore. Indeed, now at the age of 22, she finds it almost unfathomable to believe that once she did not know what the moon was at all!

Erickson said that we have learned many things without even knowing that we have been learning them. Once we have learnings, they are "tied down, chemically and electrically" in our brain and body structure, becoming available as resources for us.

From an Ontological interpretation, observing & listening refer to the same notion. They are processes of interpretation, implicitly concomitant with our learning. Furthermore, we observe and listen with ALL of our senses. When we observe or listen, we interpret what we see or hear or sense, in order to actively make meaning of what is happening in our interactions with others and the environment. And so, we say that the meaning lies with the listener or with the observer.

Here is a little exercise to do, if you wish to. Listen to the sounds around you right now. Then close your eyes and listen. Open your eyes again. Attempt to hear in the same way with eyes open and closed. Notice how the eyes are with the ears. What meaning do you make of this? What have you learned from doing this exercise that you will take into the future in a resourceful way?

And now, going back to a question we posed very early on - how could Erickson predict the likelihood of someone being a procrastinator by observing something about their clothing?? He looked at their shoes! If they were scuffed and unpolished he reasoned that "here is a person who will very likely put off until tomorrow something that they could do today!"

Anyhow, I've got to go now - and polish my shoes! Until next time, enjoy your observing! May many new kinds of "Full Moons" show up for you. Bye for now.

Peter W. Thorneycroft