

Learning for life

Creating your future

by Robin Booth
Life Coach & School Principal



The other day I phoned someone who I had not spoken to for over 10 years. Our parting long ago had been really emotionally charged and since then nothing further had been resolved. I was present to how the relationships I had in my distant past can still effect me so strongly today. In many ways those first intense relationships were the ones that helped shape who we are today. They formed a bench mark of what worked for us and what didn't. And more often than not they showed how innocent our ideas and understandings were about being in a relationship.

I really relate to that saying about how our personal growth comes through the pains and frustrations of our experiences. It makes me think about those children's toys where the child has to put the circle block through the circular hole, and the square block through the square shaped hole. You watch your child pushing and squeezing the wrong shape into the wrong hole. They try every angle, pushing, turning and finally banging it to see if that will work. You tell them it will not fit in that hole and they bang harder until in some cases it actually pops through. Then they look at you with a big grin on their faces. I recall times in my life where I felt like that circular block being squeezed through a square hole that was 10 times too small. First the tears, the heartbreak and then (hopefully) the insights and the learning.

I had a wake up call the other day when I read this comment: "Our past experiences are not really behind us in our past, but we place them directly into our future and into those experiences we live again and again." At first I didn't understand this. I like to think that my future is a clean slate and that it is undetermined; that the decisions I make are made from a place of freedom. Then I thought about all those times I had decided not to go to a certain shopping centre for the fear of bumping into her there. I also thought about all those good restaurants that I avoided because of those memories that it brought back. I realised that the decisions I make are heavily influenced (often unconsciously) by my past experiences. In fact my future has become very good at 'avoiding' my past and to such a degree that my future may actually be more of a reaction of my past opposed to a creation of what I really want. Now that would be something: creating a future that I want, to make decisions

and be present to the experience of 'now'.

As human beings, we have the unique ability to be self-aware. And being aware that we are aware of ourselves is a powerful tool in making a meaningful life. It opens up the possibility of being aware of how our past influences our experience of today and of our choices that lead into tomorrow. It enables us to make conscious decisions based on what we want and not what we fear.

"Completing the past" is a nice term for this process. It basically means taking the experiences of the past and resolving them to such a degree that you are not left with resentment, misunderstandings or avoidance. And any unresolved situation will most likely be the result of miscommunication and misperceptions. And the more skilled we are at communicating our needs and making other people feel that we understand their understanding of a situation, the more likely we are in having a positive experience with them. I am going to repeat that: "Making someone feel that we understand

"My future may actually be more of a reaction of my past opposed to a creation of what I really want"

their understanding of a situation." To be able to do this fulfils a core need for many people. At such a deep level we wish to be understood and when this is achieved we feel accepted and experience a greater

sense of belonging. Our connectedness to each other is magnified and the possibility of having a synergetic relationship increases.

In our work with young children, we can clearly see how quickly these communication patterns are being laid down and learnt. Two children are playing in the sand pit. The one does something the other doesn't like and they begin to argue. Each is trying to convince the other that their point of view is right and so the conflict grows. At some point they move away, angry about the situation and each child probably decides that in their future, "I'm not going to play with that boy again."

When we support the children in their communication, creating a space for them to understand each other's perspective of the situation, we begin to see a shared understanding and a cooperative attitude emerging. In many ways they are 'completing' the experience. If done effectively they walk away feeling heard, understood and with a positive experience of how to prevent bearing grudges and resentments.

I can not prevent children from having painful experiences of hurt, rejection and misunderstandings. What I can do is to make them feel understood and heard which results in them experiencing being valued and respected. Then I can support them in creating their futures that come from a place of meaning and value opposed to a place of reaction. And so can you! That's empowerment. That's living and learning together.

