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# Thinking at the edge

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Creativity in education often takes the form of concentrated periods of arts-based ‘light relief’ from the rigours of the National Curriculum. In psychology, on the other hand, creativity is often associated with a dramatic moment of ‘illumination’ in solving scientific, mathematical or practical problems. This paper explores a third approach called ‘thinking at the edge’ (TATE) that is based on a therapeutic practice called ‘focusing’ devised by American philosopher Eugene Gendlin. TATE involves learning the knack of delicate inward attention to a somatic process of ‘epistemic evolution’, in which hazy, pre-conceptual ideas are given time to unfold into novel forms of talking and thinking. Particular forms of exploratory writing and exploratory conversation contribute to this evolutionary process. It is argued that TATE forms a useful addition to the expanding suite of ‘positive learning dispositions’ that lie at the heart of learning to learn; constitutes a corrective to an over-rationalistic approach to teaching ‘thinking skills’, and offers a clear example of how learning dispositions may potentially be cultivated in educational settings.

## Introduction

The words or the language as they are written or spoken do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The physical entities which seem to serve as elements of thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be voluntarily reproduced and combined. ... This combinatory play seems to be *the* essential feature in productive thought, before there is any connection with logical construction in words or other kinds of sign which can be communicated to others. ... In a stage where words intervene at all, they are, in my case, purely auditive, but they interfere only in a secondary stage. (Albert Einstein)

There are as many different *angles* on creativity, and as many different *kinds* of creativity, as there are of learning. Attempts to boil either creativity or learning down to a simple formula, and declare ‘This is what it is *really*’, are attempts to pass off a snippet of insight as the ‘Whole Truth’. Let me begin by contrasting two of these partial versions that have wide currency at the moment, and show how they can be prised apart to make space for the kind of creative process that I want to focus on in this article: what I shall call ‘soft creativity’.

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0 In education, especially at primary level, despite protestations to the contrary, 0  
 creativity is often treated as if it (a) is specially related to the arts; (b) involves a  
 concentrated episode of colourful, rather manic, activity; (c) is something that  
 everyone can engage in equally—provided only that (d) they are allowed or  
 encouraged (see Craft, 2005, for a critique of this view).

5 In the psychological literature, on the other hand, creativity is quintessentially 5  
 associated with a sudden moment of abrupt illumination, in which the solution to a  
 previously intractable problem leaps into consciousness fully formed, without any  
 immediately preceding process of methodical, rational problem-solving. Archimedes  
 leaping out of his bath, Mozart waking up with a symphony in his head, Kékulé  
 10 discovering the benzene ring: over and over, these are presented as the apocryphal 10  
 moments of creativity (see Finke *et al.*, 1992).

Both of these images of creativity are, as I say, partial, stereotypical, and  
 potentially misleading. Of course composition and choreography involve creativity,  
 but so too do hairdressing, architecture, product development and financial services.  
 15 Of course creativity may sometimes involve periods of wild brainstorming and 15  
 experimentation, but more often it involves private sketching, gazing out of the  
 window, and quietly mulling over notes and possibilities, or what jazz musicians call  
 ‘noodling’ (a kind of absent-minded improvisation). Of course we want to encourage  
 students to flex their imaginations, but not all of them are equally adept at all the  
 20 different elements and phases that contribute to the successful completion of a 20  
 creative project; and the contributory skills and attitudes can be the subject of  
 gradual, systematic cultivation, not merely ‘allowed’ in occasional frenzies of ‘off-  
 curricular excitement’ (Claxton & Lucas, 2004). And obviously there are those  
 inexplicable moments of sudden illumination and insight. But more often, it seems,  
 25 there is a softer, slower kind of groping for a way of articulating something that is 25  
 currently, tantalizingly, beyond our linguistic grasp (see Ghiselin, 1952). It is these  
 gentle, generic, but often unsung, aspects of the creative process that I want to  
 describe in this paper, before going on to offer some suggestions about how they can  
 be nurtured throughout the normal school day.

30 Let me give an immediate example of the kind of process I am talking about. 30  
 There are, I hope, elements of creativity in this paper, yet its writing conforms to  
 neither of the stereotypes outlined above. No blinding flash of inspiration. No flurry  
 of post-its. Instead, there was a background swell of knowledge and interest in the  
 place of ‘intuition’ in creativity; a dissatisfaction with the ghettoized, bolt-on  
 35 approaches to creativity typified in many primary schools by ‘mediaeval week’; 35  
 an email from a researcher in the US telling me about some new work by a longstanding  
 intellectual hero of mine, Eugene Gendlin; and the need to deliver a paper which I  
 had promised for the CJE. The Gendlin papers had been pored over and scribbled  
 40 on some time back, but I had not got around to drawing out their potential for 40  
 education—though I was sure it was there. Now, as I sit at my computer,  
 surrounded by papers, notes and diagrams, mulling over what I have just written to  
 see if it really captures what I want to say, changing words and moving sentences  
 around, the process of writing is itself a creative fumbling towards something that I

*feel* is fruitful, but have not thought before, or not as clearly as I am trying to describe it now. That's the more mundane, patient, real-world kind of kind of creativity that is the stock-in-trade of the designer, the novelist or the gardener, and which I think it would be useful for teachers to help young people get used to, and get better at.

Let me prefigure where this might lead educationally with three simple examples of the kind of thing that some teachers do, and many more could (or could do more systematically), to develop the psychological dispositions—the habits of mind—that are hospitable to such 'soft creativity'.

- Instead of having students do their 'working out' on scrap paper that gets thrown away, and only handing in a 'fair copy' in their 'best books', have one book with the left-hand page for drafting and doodling, and the right hand for 'the best draft so far'. Make time for students to share their preliminary thoughts and experiments with each other, and to talk about what was at the back of their mind as they were sketching, and why they did or didn't go further with an idea.
- Encourage students to keep a 'commonplace book'—what Peter Abbs (1994) has described as 'the larder of reflexive intelligence'—in which they keep scraps of overhead conversation, images, quotes, fleeting thoughts that did not go anywhere at the time but you never know ... as most creative writers, composers, scientists (and, I would hope, window dressers and copywriters) do (see Wright Mills, 1959; John-Steiner, 1997).
- Create displays on the walls of corridors and classrooms that show successive drafts of a painting, a composition, a design, a poem ... so that the creative, hesitant drafting process is made visible, and given legitimacy, value and status.

(I do not know of any research that proves that such teaching strategies result in more imaginative, patient, creative students—but I have a strong hunch, and that hunch could well form the seed of a research project, somewhere down the track. Any masters students looking for a potential Ph.D. project, please note.)

The foregoing tries to outline what I consider to be a fruitful, and as yet under-explored, aspect of creativity in education, namely the gentle, long-term cultivation of the psychological skills and attitudes that underpin a wide range of creative projects—all those that involve the gradual emergence of an idea, or a way of thinking or talking, that gives a novel purchase on an interesting and previously intractable problem (or which give, as it were, a satisfying scratch to a creative itch). Before coming back to the educational implications of this view of creativity, however, it is helpful to explore the phenomenon of 'thinking at the edge' in a little more detail.

## Focusing

Heaven opens inward, chasms yawn,  
Vast images in glittering dawn  
Half-shewn, are broken and withdrawn ...  
(Alfred Lord Tennyson)

3

Eugene Gendlin is a philosopher and researcher with a longstanding interest in psychotherapy. During the 1960s, he led a large research team at the University of Chicago trying to pinpoint what was happening in successful therapy sessions. It turned out that the ‘magic ingredient’ that predicted whether clients would make positive progress was not the therapist’s ‘school’, not their technique, not even their personality, but something to do with the client’s spontaneous way of talking and thinking. If they spoke with clarity and certainty about their problems, they were likely to stay stuck. But if their talk was punctuated with pauses and hesitations, as if they were groping for just the right fresh words to capture what they wanted to say, then they were much more likely to be making progress. The second thing that Gendlin’s team discovered was that those clients who did not yet have the knack of this gentle, tentative, exploratory way of thinking and talking, could be taught it. And if they were, their satisfaction with their sessions increased and their therapeutic progress speeded up (Gendlin, 1978, 1996).<sup>1</sup>

Out of these observations Gendlin distilled an introspective procedure that he called ‘focusing’, which anyone could learn and use, either in the context of a therapy session or on their own, for exploring personal issues. The key to focusing was learning a new way of attending to yourself. You ask yourself a very general question such as ‘What is this whole thing (whatever it is) about?’, and then, instead of giving yourself the usual quick answer, you direct your attention to your body, especially to the throat, torso and stomach area, and become patiently receptive to any small stirrings or promptings that occur there in response to the query. You are on the look-out for the kinds of ‘embodied knowing’ that occur, for example, when you feel out of sorts with a friend, but cannot quite put your finger on what is wrong, or when you leave a meeting with a vague, visceral sense of dissatisfaction that you cannot, for the moment, explain.

Such pre-conceptual promptings Gendlin refers to as a ‘felt sense’. Once such a hazy sense is located, you then—slowly and patiently again—see if you can find a short form of words, or perhaps an image, that captures the essence of the felt sense. Once a candidate phrase or image presents itself, you always refer back to the felt sense itself, asking yourself ‘Is that right?’ Either there will be a physical reaction that signals ‘Not quite’ or ‘Not really’, or there will be a feeling of satisfaction—‘Yes, that’s it’—that surfaces as a small feeling of ease or release. Then the felt sense changes, and you can repeat the cycle of unfolding your own meaning to yourself.

There is a wider body of research that underpins the practice of focusing that has recently come to be called ‘embodied cognition’ (Clark, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Varela *et al.*, 1991). Recent work in neuroscience and immunology, for example, has revealed how intricately and instantaneously ‘brain’ and ‘body’ affect each other (through a host of neuronal and neurochemical means): so much so that they are better seen as a single, integrated cognitive system. Changes in this system are quite capable of manifesting as physical sensations, despite the fact that there is no explicit, articulated corollary in consciousness. This is what happens when the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, though you are not conscious of the cause, or when you are ‘touched’ or ‘moved’ by a photograph or a poem, though you

cannot explain why. The body can give intimations of a cognitive process—that is, an activity that involves ‘knowing’ and ‘interpretation’—in the absence of, or in advance of, the ability of the ‘mind’ to come up with clear depictions or justifications of what is going on. (How does the witch in Macbeth know that ‘something evil this way comes’? ‘By the pricking of my thumbs’, she says.)

### **A working model of the embodied-knowing system**

To get a feel for the embodied cognition approach, imagine that the ‘knowing system’ embodied in our biology is actually composed of four interwoven layers (see Claxton, 2005). The deepest and oldest layer comprises the constraints and biases built into our genes—what we could call the ‘gene-scape’. The evolutionary residues in the gene-scape constrain how high we can jump, what sounds we can hear, what kinds of basic emotional systems we activate in response to different kinds of archetypal threat. We are preconfigured to be frightened of snakes, but not of bananas, and so on.

Then comes the vast tangle of momentary memory impressions, and the emotional and evaluative reactions we had to those events, that we are accumulating every moment: call it the ‘net-scape’. Some of these mnemonic residues of experience are capable of generating conscious ‘memories’, but many are not, either because they have become inaccessible, or because they flew in to our minds below the radar of consciousness in the first place. (Subliminal perception and unconscious registration are now known to be vital moment-to-moment realities: see Claxton, 1997; Myers, 2002.)

A very important part of the brain’s function is to distil out of these residues the useful generalizations that we call habits and concepts, and these get woven together into the third layer of knowing, which we can call the ‘skill-scape’. It is the skill-scape that enables us to see most new situations as variants on familiar scenarios, and thus apply tried and tested packets of expertise to deal with them. It is the way that the skill-scape is constructed and altered that is being elucidated so successfully by ‘connectionist’ or neural network modeling (see Spitzer, 1999).

And finally, growing out of the skill-scape is the fourth layer of the system, the ‘word-scape’, that enables us to articulate, explain and share our concepts, interpretations and impressions. The word-scape initially grows out of the skill-scape, as we learn words to name recurrent concepts and actions. But it rapidly acquires both a cultural slant, as we are taught to segment the world in socially-agreed ways; and also a degree of independence from the skill-scape, as we discover our ability to create word-patterns that have no direct underpinning in terms of our personal experience. We can say (or think) ‘a horse with a long horn’, and though we have never seen such a creature, the lower layers of the knowing-system can be recruited to construct a quasi-perceptual impression of a unicorn (and even, if we want, embellish it with character traits and a story). Modelers such as Spitzer (1999) explore the functional relationship between skill-scape and words-scape in their so-called ‘hybrid networks’.

0 This layered model of memory can help us see what is happening in Gendlin's 0  
 focusing process. Gendlin zooms in on a particular kind of 'knowing' which starts  
 with a pattern of activation in the net-scape, and which then undergoes a process of  
 evolution and emergence as it is translated into a pattern of concepts in the skill-  
 5 scape, and thence into a verbalizable account in the word-scape. This process of 5  
 'epistemic evolution' can be done either quickly and crudely, or slowly and subtly (or  
 at some intermediate point along this dimension). Which way we do it depends on  
 (a) the demands of the situation (in an emergency you don't want to spend time  
 delicately exploring how it would feel to be burnt alive); and (b) our own engrained  
 10 processing habits and dispositions. Some people are inclined to 'leap to conclusions', 10  
 quickly dismembering a felt sense into the most readily-available categories afforded  
 by the skill- and word-scapes, regardless of the pressures and time constraints of the  
 situation. Others like to be more contemplative, allowing the brain time to search for  
 a more sophisticated or novel kind of decomposition that does better justice to the  
 'meaning' inherent in the original pattern of activation.

15 Gendlin's point is this: that the kind of personal problem-solving that happens in 15  
 counseling and psychotherapy usually requires slow, delicate, hazy knowing, rather  
 than quick, conceptual, conscious knowing. The main problem is often not one of  
 'deciding what to do', but of coming to understand more precisely what it is that  
 20 makes things appear problematic to us in the particular way they do. And that kind 20  
 of knowing requires us to be able to go 'back to basics'; to start with the complicated,  
 murky 'felt sense' of the predicament, and then slow down the process of epistemic  
 evolution so we can (a) see more clearly what kinds of assumptions we might,  
 25 unconsciously, have been stirring in to the conceptual mix;<sup>2</sup> and (b) allow the 25  
 emerging conceptualization to be driven, and continually refined, by the felt sense  
 itself, rather than forcing it to fit the pre-existing templates, categories, habits and  
 phrases that we happen to have installed in the skill-scape and the word-scape.  
 Focusing enables people to regain some flexibility, with regard to their 'ways of  
 30 knowing'. In particular, it helps them relearn the kind of patient, open-minded 30  
 attentiveness that allows them to conceptualize their predicament in a way that is  
 fresher, more differentiated, and more accurate, in the sense of being closer to the  
 complex reality of their own embodied knowing. The word-scape and skill-scape  
 become more congruent with the net-scape, and thus actions are more likely to be  
 effective and thoughts more satisfying.

### 35 **Thinking at the edge (TATE)** 35

40 [Neils Bohr] used classical mechanics or quantum theory as a painter uses his brush or 40  
 colours. Brushes do not determine the picture, and colour is never the full reality. But if  
 he keeps the picture before his mind's eye, the artist can use his brush to convey,  
 however inadequately, his own mental picture to others. Bohr ... [has formed] an  
 intuitive picture of different atoms; a picture he can only convey to other physicists *by*  
 45 *such inadequate means* as electron orbits and quantum conditions. It is not at all certain 45  
 that Bohr himself *believes* that electrons revolve inside the atom. (Werner Heisenberg  
 emphasis added)

4

0 Personal, emotional predicaments are not the only kinds of problems to which this 0  
 analysis applies. In his most recent writing, Gendlin (2004) extends his approach to  
 a broader range of situations where the same kind of patient rumination and verbal  
 exploration, resulting in a rewriting of the conceptual and linguistic landscapes, is  
 beneficial. ‘Thinking at the edge’ (TATE) is a systematic way to articulate in new  
 5 terms something which needs to be said but is at first only an inchoate ‘bodily sense’, 5  
 he writes, and quotes approvingly one of his students who said: ‘You mean  
 something about which we have to do hemming and hawing?’ To put it another way,  
 such situations are those that do not succumb to methodical problem-solving using  
 familiar constructs, but which require *creativity*: the particular kind of soft creativity  
 10 that I outlined in the introduction (and which Heisenberg’s description of Neils 10  
 Bohr’s creativity nicely captures).<sup>3</sup>

To recapitulate: these kinds of creativity are very different from those where  
 someone tells you what the project is going to be; when and for how long it is going  
 15 to occur; what kind of product there will be at the end; and where the amount of 15  
 background information and experience you need to engage with the ‘creative  
 process’ is strictly limited (as is usually the case with ‘mediaeval week’). Bohr’s  
 creativity is more typical of real-life situations where the project is often ill-defined  
 and open-ended; where it is the creator’s intuitive feeling of satisfaction that  
 determines the outcome; and where they already possess a considerable amount of  
 20 knowledge and experience—where, as philosopher Michael Polanyi (1958) put it, 20  
 ‘they know much more than they know they know’. This ‘more’, and the skill to  
 make use of it, are at the heart of this kind of creativity. Gendlin says: ‘When the  
 living body becomes able to carry itself forward by symbolizing itself, it acts and  
 speaks from a vast intricacy’.

25 It is this partly submerged, half-forgotten mass of information and impressions— 25  
 what I have been calling the net-scape—that generates both the dissatisfaction  
 that sparks the problem-solving process, and also the intuitive feeling of rightness  
 (or wrongness) that guides the process. This sense of rightness—the same  
 immediate, unjustifiable feeling of ‘Yes, that’s it’ that guides the process of  
 30 focusing—seems to be essential to the kind of creativity I am exploring. A 30  
 choreographer may not know what it is she is looking for until she tries out one more  
 move and gets the ‘Yes, that’s it’ response. As I write, I too do not know quite what I  
 want to say, nor precisely where the discussion is heading, until a sentence hits the  
 screen and I get the ‘Yes, that’s it’ feeling. Even research scientists must learn to  
 35 recognize and trust that intuition. As Michael Brown, Nobel laureate in chemistry, 35  
 put it:

As we did our work we felt at times that there was almost a hand guiding us. Because we  
 would go from one step to the next, and somehow we would know which was the right  
 way to go. And I really can’t tell you how we knew that. [5]

40 While the laureate in medicine Stanley Cohen said he gets: 40

... a feeling of ‘Well, I don’t really believe this result’, or ‘This is an important result’... I  
 am not always right, but I do have feelings about what is an important observation and  
 what is probably trivial. (Cohen, quoted in Fensham & Marton, 1992) [6]

Gendlin and his associates have worked out a detailed 14-step protocol for developing a felt sense of a creative project into a full-blown product or theory. So far they have concentrated mainly on how to evolve a new, more satisfying way of conceptualizing a puzzling range of phenomena. Their examples range from philosophy of science (how science develops as a result of apparent equipment malfunctions), translating texts for the EU (how to capture layers of meaning), and psychotherapy (how to ‘accept’ that which we manifestly don’t accept).

In thinking at the edge, exploratory writing is claimed to be a powerful tool for encouraging the process of unfolding, as well as for harvesting and winnowing its produce. You let a vague, messy felt sense of the problem form, and then write a paragraph or two about it. Boil that down into one sentence, even though that doesn’t really capture what you want to say. Identify the key word or phrase in that sentence. Write down the ordinary definition or usage of that word or phrase, and see what it is about that usage that doesn’t ‘work’. Next, go back to the felt sense and find another couple of words that might do better, and write down what they mean. Then go back to your original key phrase and write down more precisely what it is that you would like it to be able to mean. Distil out some new phrases, and try these in the summary sentence to see if they capture more fully the essence of what it is you are trying to say. Write some new paragraphs that explicate more fully what these phrases mean to you. Go back to a specific example of what it is you are puzzling over, and see if your new terminology help you to say what you want to say about it. Gradually distil out of these exploratory writings a new set of key terms, and explore, again in writing, how they relate to each other. You will now be well on the way to (a) having generated a new, creative conceptualization of your puzzling phenomena; and (b) being able to explain your conceptualization, and why it is an improvement on current usage, to others.

In practice, TATE, like focusing itself, is often a highly collaborative and interactive process. In a response to the first draft of this paper, Christina Honde, one of Gendlin’s associates, wrote:

The way they’re teaching TATE now, it really is quite an interactive process, using partnerships, as in the focusing model. ... When most people do TATE, it’s true that they spend time writing (consulting their felt sense as they do so), but they also spend a lot of time talking to their partner, who acts as a kind of secretary for them, writing down what they say and from time to time pointing out connections (in the person’s own thinking) that the person might not have noticed for him/herself. ... As in focusing, it is supportive and validating to have another person listening to one’s half-baked, not yet clearly formulated, ideas, taking them seriously but without offering advice, critique, etc. ... And when you have a partner or a workshop group, you can use them as your ‘dictionary’ when you are doing that step. ... It’s wonderful to take your key word or phrase and ask three different people what it means for them. It gives you so much to ‘push against’, to say ‘Yeah, this part works for me but this part isn’t at all what I mean’.

## Back to school

To date, most of Gendlin’s examples of TATE have been with adults (see Gendlin, 2004), but some of his associates have been exploring the applicability

of TATE to creative thinking with school students. Larrabee (2004), for example, describes a series of six one-hour sessions she held over the course of one semester with a class of 13-year-olds (eighth graders). They practised finding an internal, embodied ‘felt sense’, and she suggested to them that ‘this is one place where you might find your own creative edge’. Students were asked to think of an area of their life that was significant but puzzling to them, and see if the felt sense could give them the beginnings of a clearer picture. They were taken through the steps outlined in the previous paragraph, and eventually asked to write something that captured their new understanding which they shared with family, friends and teachers.

Though there is as yet little in the way of hard evaluation of the programme, Larrabee claims some success, and quotes some of the students’ reactions to the TATE process. Their descriptions of the felt sense include the following:

It’s a big black bubble type of thing ... and little smokes wafting out that you can catch, something that feels original, coming out of my innermost being.

You go blank and stop thinking and find something ... like waking-up—this is where your mind’s supposed to start thinking.

A place inside ... [where you can] just be yourself and release whatever thoughts and be what you are.

Commenting on the whole process, another student said: ‘The best part—being able to express yourself, thinking outside of what I would normally think about—it led me to find myself’.

It is clear that ‘thinking at the edge’ is a new and relatively unvalidated approach to ‘soft creativity’, as yet. Early reports suggest that both young people and adults find the process interesting and even exciting. The idea that it can take intelligent people time to find the words to say what they want to say, can be liberating. The idea that knowing how to make this time, and to use it skillfully, are aspects of intelligence itself, can help to undercut the pernicious idea that clever people are always fast, and that ‘slow’ is an acceptable euphemism for ‘stupid’. (Robert Sternberg has recently argued that ‘if anything, the essence of intelligence would seem to be in knowing when to think and act quickly and knowing when to think and act slowly’; Sternberg, 1999). And TATE seems to be accessible enough to furnish ideas that any teacher could try out for themselves.

### **TATE and building learning power (BLP)**

TATE offers a set of methods for encouraging people to engage in the slow, hazy thinking that is so often an essential precursor to full-blown creativity. But it is potentially more than that: it could also offer a cumulative kind of mental coaching that enables them to get better at it. And here it connects with the idea, developed by Art Costa (Costa & Kallick, 2000), David Perkins (1995), Ron Ritchhart (2002), myself (Claxton, 2002) and others, that education might be configured to systematically develop ‘positive learning dispositions’ (as well as transmit ‘bodies

of knowledge, skill and understanding'). Perhaps, as Sternberg suggests, knowing when and how to think slowly—and 'hazily'—might themselves be aspects of learnable intelligence, capable of methodical cultivation

The deliberate development of learning dispositions, embodied in approaches such as Art Costa's 'habits of mind', or my 'building learning power', goes beyond the more familiar teaching of 'thinking skills' or 'learning to learn' in two ways. First, they aim explicitly at cultivating useful mental capabilities that become activated in a wide range of real-world, as well as in-school, contexts. They aim, in other words, at developing more powerful lifelong learners, as well as helping students to get better marks.

And secondly, they do so by using not just engaging materials and special-purpose activities, but by the development of a broad *epistemic culture* in classrooms and throughout the school as a whole—what Perkins (1995) refers to as the 'infusion approach'. This involves attention to many aspects of the culture: the pedagogic practices; the dominant vocabularies and forms of discourse used between teachers and students; formal and informal modes of appraisal and assessment; management practices; staffroom culture; and the examples of learning that are set by all members of the organisation (see Claxton, 2002, for an example of the infusion approach). The informal examples provided towards the beginning of this paper were designed to give a flavour of the kinds of small changes to practice that can contribute to an overall epistemic culture change.

It seems clear that TATE is a novel, exciting and essential candidate for membership of that set of positive learning dispositions. Much real-world learning involves not the acquisition of new information so much as the intelligent use of the rich impressions and information one already has. The creative breakthrough—whether it be in a maths problem, a predicament at work, or in a relationship—often comes as a reordering of what one already knows, or in a novel analogy that spontaneously 'comes to mind'. And the evidence is that such internal reorganization occurs most frequently in a particular frame of mind: one that is internal, relaxed, open, attentive and tentative (Martindale, 1999).

There are also some indications that a basic disposition towards such reverie, and its use in learning, can be cultivated even in young children (Slack & Fontana, 2000; Claxton *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, many primary school teachers are familiar with the value of a few moments 'quiet time', head on hands or gazing quietly out of the window, before pupils embark on a piece of work TATE offers a more sophisticated version of such inward attention, and also has the potential to coach students in the increasingly subtle use of reflective writing as a general-purpose tool for their own creative learning. In that way, it contributed to an enriched understanding of what 'learning to learn' involves, and how it can be pursued most effectively in schools.

## Notes

1. I am, I hope, capturing the spirit of Gendlin's work, though I am using my own words, and, in places, going beyond what Gendlin and his associates have written.
2. Cognitive behavioural therapy, CBT, is particularly focused on this part of the process.
3. More information about both focusing and TATE is available at [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org).

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