

The Thinking Environment

- An ideal model for homœopathic consultations

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Michelle is passionate about the profession of homœopathy and is the current AHA representative and Chairperson to the International Council for Homœopathy. She is also an accredited Thinking Environment facilitator and provides workshops to support teams transform their meetings and group experiences.

Abstract: This article explores the ten components of *Nancy Kline's* Thinking Environment: attention, equality, ease, appreciation, encouragement, feelings, information, diversity incisive questions and place and how the components relate to homœopathic case-taking. It is proposed that the Thinking Environment offers a model of care for homœopathic case-taking and professional development.

Keywords: Thinking Environment, Nancy Kline, Ten Components, Case-taking.

Introduction: The Thinking Environment

The Thinking Environment (TE) is a set of conditions under which people can think for themselves and think well together. It stems from the lifetime's work of Nancy Kline and is based on her realisation that:

Everything we do depends for its quality on the thinking we do first.

And a question:

How do we help people to think for themselves?

After years of study, Kline observed that the most important determinant of the quality of thinking directly related to how people are treated by those around them. She researched human behaviour and eventually established ten essential qualities, which together form a system or way of 'being in the world'.

The ten components are all interconnected. They do not exist independent of each other and do not necessarily have an order of importance. From personal experience, embracing or embodying even one of the components can change the way we are in ourselves or in any interaction we have. When we actively practice all ten, we can transform our human experience.

When first immersed in the Thinking Environment, it became apparent that when homœopaths take a case, they are actually *being* Thinking Environments. Many of the components correlate, as practitioners strive to create an atmosphere conducive to optimizing the client's experience and to eliciting the totality of symptoms. As homœopaths evolve as practitioners, it is important to develop reflective practice skills and expand our understanding of the models of care utilized.

The Thinking Environment provides an excellent framework for practitioner

development in the art of 'receiving' a case and being an unprejudiced observer, so important in homœopathic philosophy. This system also provides a brilliant model for transforming communications within teams, improving work cultures and is an excellent vehicle for supervision and mentoring.

Attention

Attention is the act of listening with palpable respect and fascination. It is the key to a Thinking Environment. When you are listening in this way, what you are hearing is directly related to the effect you are having on the person speaking or thinking. Listening in this way ignites the mind and is generative by nature. As Kline says,

"The quality of your attention determines the quality of other people's thinking." (2011)

It is a rule of the Thinking Environment that when you are giving this generative quality of attention and respect, that there is no interruption. In our every day interactions, most people are partially listening and partially thinking about their own response and when they can interrupt to make their contribution. Consequently, the person speaking is mindful that an interruption is imminent, so their thoughts are restricted or rushed. We know that the experience of being interrupted is not good. It is possible to get lucky and not be interrupted, which is better. However, to know absolutely that you will not be interrupted is categorically different. The mind is then free to go to places and thoughts that would not have been possible without that freedom.

Mastering generative attention

Mastering generative attention is absolutely relevant to homœopathic case-taking and most of us are used to taking a case this way. Kline tells us that expressions are unintentional and learned from childhood and family. Your face is a force of encouragement or discouragement. She teaches that your face matters and can determine where

people dare to venture. So, when trying to embody generative attention it is important to try not to frown or tighten the face. Be interested and show it; be yourself and not artificial; be truly interested, respectful and fascinated and learn how to make your face show it. Whilst you are providing generative attention, it is important to keep your eyes on the eyes of the person thinking, no matter what. Their eyes may wander, but yours must not.

Quiet

The importance of quiet needs to be considered when providing generative attention. Just because someone has stopped talking does not mean they have finished thinking. When they are quiet, they may be busy and having their breakthrough thoughts. They need to be allowed this privileged space. The quiet is alive. The power of silence, of being present with another human mind, is when profound things happen (Kline, 2011). The quiet busy times are when the least seems to be happening but the most is happening. Kline also tells us that busy quiet is different to dead quiet. We need to learn to differentiate between the two and become easeful in the silence. This directly corresponds to use of silence in homeopathic consultation, and is a time when important symptoms often emerge.

Infantilisation

Is the act of treating someone (including children) like a child. Deciding for them what is best, directing them, assuming we know better than they do, worrying about them, taking care of them, controlling them ourselves and making them dependent on us. Kline tells us that you infantilise when you want the wellbeing of another person intensely, but you also intensely want to be seen as an expert, indispensable and brilliant. How many homeopaths need to keep check on this potential unhealthy attribute? How many dispense unsolicited advice as well as the homeopathic medicine? From a Thinking Environment perspective, Kline tells us that to infantilise is to belittle the mind. She maintains that every component of the TE is chosen to prevent infantilisation.

Equality

"Everyone is equal in their ability to think for themselves... Respect is the hallmark of a Thinking Environment and equality is its base (Kline, 2011)

This is the underpinning of the Thinking Environment. Kline tells us that even in a hierarchy, people can be equals as thinkers and their thoughts valued equally. The simple act of knowing that you will have your turn improves the quality of listening and keeps the loud people from having more air time than the quieter ones. In our society, professions, corporations etc., there is a culture of intimidation where people come to believe that the higher up you go, the better you can think.

Mastering Equality

In group and team meetings, Kline tells us to first *regard* other thinkers as your equal and then *show* them by:

- Giving equal time to express what they think
- By listening with generative attention
- By asking what more they think.

Professionals, including homeopaths, are traditionally considered the 'expert'. There is an assumption that they think better than the client; that they have the answers. The idea that clients and team members are equal as thinkers is a new concept.

Ease

Ease is the ability to be free from internal rush or urgency. Kline tells us that ease is a deceptively subtle catalyst; that ease creates, and urgency destroys (Kline, 2011)

Ease is a component that can be challenging to master. We live in a fast-paced world where many of us feel overwhelmed by the busyness of our lives. There is little time to just be still and enjoy the moment. On the other hand, people immersed in ease are able to see solutions and think more clearly. This is one of the beautiful and unique qualities of homeopathic case-taking. People have time to fully express the nature of their complaint because of the length of consultation, which in itself creates ease.

Mastering Ease

Kline tells us that after experiencing ease, people don't automatically do it for others. They need to learn how to generate it themselves. There are times in homeopathic consultations where interactions become stuck and are not flowing. Using some of these suggestions to master ease can get the case-taking back on track.

Kline teaches that ease is an 'inside' thing. You slow down; you still your internal day. You focus and you notice that you exist and

that you are in this very moment, in this very room and with this very person. You 'see' them. You let yourself let them be. *You say how long you have* and you keep the boundary clear so you can be fully with them, letting distractions deflate. This is a good limit to set when people call you in clinic on a busy day or after hours.

Appreciation

"The human mind thinks more rigorously and creatively in a context of genuine appreciation." (Kline, 2011)

Kline also tells us that within the ten components, each component is an act of appreciation and that all ten in place at once is a system of appreciation.

Kline's observations have been somewhat substantiated by neuro-science. She reports that neuro-imaging (SPECT scan) demonstrates that appreciative thoughts and feelings affect the blood flow to the brain and that thinking needs blood flow to the brain. Also that when the heart's rhythm patterns are at healthy levels, the cortex gets active. In the presence of appreciation, the rhythm and pattern of the heart move towards healthy levels.

Mastering Appreciation

When you are paying attention to someone as they think, indicate with your face and eyes and sounds that you respect them and appreciate them as thinkers. This is a way of demonstrating appreciation in a non-verbal manner. When delivering appreciation to someone, be genuine, succinct and specific/concrete. This helps people to 'hear' it and apply it to their lives. If you pretend, the receiver will distrust genuine appreciation. Don't start the appreciation with a negative prelude. Just say the positive quality. And don't diminish yourself in the process by comparing yourself negatively.

Part of appreciation is the skill of receiving it. We are not used to doing this graciously and often dismiss or minimise the compliment, which is an insult to the person giving appreciation. Insults are a thinking inhibitor (Kline). When someone gives you appreciation, just say 'THANK YOU' and think of it as a gift. Saying thank you sustains the Thinking Environment (Kline, 2011).

In homeopathic practice, we can express appreciation to clients for sharing their case and for a particular quality if appropriate. For example, "Thank you for sharing your case with me. I really appreciate your courage to talk about such painful issues." This helps to validate the content

shared and creates a sense of closure at the end of the session. When clients express their appreciation for us, just say thank you, without minimizing or negating the sentiment.

Encouragement

There are three aspects to this component. One is about COURAGE – the courage to go beyond your limits with thinking. Then there is the act of ENCOURAGEMENT of the thinker via the Thinking Environment. Thirdly there is the thinking inhibitor of COMPETITION. They are all interconnected.

Kline has observed that one of the most persuasive assumptions to the collective psyche is that we have to be more, more, better, better. More influential, richer, smarter etc.). She accepts that striving to be better is sometimes important. However, courageous thinking needs freedom from preoccupation with what others are thinking of our thinking. It needs trust and ease. In this place, you are free to be yourself without trying to be better (Kline, 2011).

Kline tells us that competition stifles encouragement and limits thinking. She says that competition between thinkers keeps attention on the rival – not on what you really think. If you as listener *feel* competitive with the thinker, you cannot communicate this level of encouragement. If the thinker is competing with you, they will not be able to pursue their own ideas fully or honestly. They will be drawn back for fear it will not impress you. Competition discourages their thinking for themselves.

Mastering Encouragement

In order for a person to be able to think that well, they have to be encouraged by the listener without envy or competition. The idea is to listen without competition. Be thrilled with the quality of their ideas and expect the same in return.

In practice, we can embody encouragement in the way we listen to clients – through our body language, eye contact and verbal open questions. This communicates to the person that everything they say matters, that they are important. This is very encouraging. Another tip is to use verbal prompts as encouragement, such as, “You are doing really well. Tell me more about that.”

Feelings

Kline tells us that thinking stops when we are upset, but that if we express feelings just enough, thinking re-starts. She says that repression of feelings represses clear

thinking. Some of Kline’s sound bites include: Crying can make you smarter; After laughing, thinking improves (Kline, 2011).

In our culture, crying can be perceived as being out of control, falling apart or sick. We have been taught to do anything to ‘pull ourselves together’ – boys especially. When someone expresses emotions in public, many people in the room feel uncomfortable and don’t know what to do or say in the moment. When people start to cry publicly, the first response is often to apologise, or to leave the room.

Suppressing emotions does not stop the pain. It just gets hidden and can cause neuroses and physical disease (Kline, 2011). Homœopaths see this in clinical practice and understand the aetiology of suppressed emotions in chronic disease, according to *Hahnemann’s* homœopathic philosophy. Kline also states that fear constricts everything – especially thinking. Many people are afraid of failure, humiliation, exclusion and many more things. But when the focus is strong on these thoughts, our thinking can be consumed.

Mastering Feelings

Kline suggests that when feelings come, we should allow appropriate emotional release to restore thinking. Just sit and listen as if they were talking, she tells us. Pay attention without panicking and smothering them with concern. If angry, don’t try to reason at this point. Listen and get them to say more until it has truly subsided (unless there is aggression and risk of harm. In this case, safety comes first). These are good tips for homœopathic practice. People often cry when expressing their symptoms and practitioners need to develop ease around letting emotions flow in a safe way.

Information

Information is about providing the facts. Accurate information is crucial to thinking well about the topic – facts, figures, data. Kline states that one could argue that you shouldn’t even bother to think until you have full and accurate information (2011). Just as homœopaths shouldn’t start to think about medicines until they have analysed the whole case.

Kline tells us that thinking works best in the presence of reality; that facing what you have been denying frees you to think clearly. Further, that part of reality is correct information about what is real, even if what is real is painful or disappointing or threatening.

“Your mind does have the capacity to handle anything. But it can’t do it in the presence of lies.” (Kline, 2011)

In homœopathic practice, we can consider the importance of having the correct information about the case. Has the client had the appropriate medical examinations? Do we understand the reports and can we discuss the results with the client to provide safe, holistic healthcare? With the correct information, we can support clients to make informed decisions about their healthcare options.

Denial

Denial is part of this component. Denial is the assumption that what is true is not true. Or, that what is not true is. Kline teaches that supplying technically correct information pierces denial (Kline, 2011). Sometimes denial can occur when something is too difficult to face, so your mind interprets it as something else. Kline states that questions help to puncture denial. For example,

- What are you not facing that is right in front of your face?
- What are you assuming that lets you ignore this?
- If you were to face it, what positive outcomes might result?
- If you knew that you can handle the fall out, what steps would you take to live free of this denial?

These questions could be utilized in homœopathic practice, if appropriate, as part of perceiving the underlying cause for dis-ease in the case.

Mastering Information

The question is, how do you give information in a Thinking Environment without destroying the TE for the person or the process, because the thinker (or client) needs information – at the right moments. When there is misinformation, the temptation to correct can be so overwhelming, especially when you feel discomfort at being there. We need to be careful not to give information to show off. This is so pertinent to practitioners. Homœopaths should only provide information if it’s relevant and helpful to the person – not as a way of making themselves feel more important. When providing information is necessary, these Thinking Environment rules are good guidelines.

Kline proposes that we:

- Let the person speaking finish their sentence
- Supply information but time it so that it keeps a TE strong between you
- Ask yourself when and how do I do this so the person can keep thinking well.
- Ask yourself why you choose to give the information. Make sure it is to help them think better.
- Supply information only when you are sure that it will make a decisive difference in the direction, content or progress of the person's thinking.

Equally, asking for information from the thinker needs to be timed well. It should only occur if it is necessary for the person thinking to think well, and only when it will not interrupt a successful stream of thought. This also applies to asking questions in case-taking. Following a client's process ensures that the information gathered is what is true and uppermost in their case.

Diversity

In a Thinking Environment, diversity refers to diversity in group identities and diversity of ideas.

Kline states that diversity is a thinking enhancer because it frees the mind of two limiting assumptions:

- That the dominant group is superior so everyone should think like them
- That because the dominant group is superior it should have power over the others.

She says that real diversity is achieved when groups are stripped of these assumptions, when differences are celebrated and when power lies in the hands of a truly mixed group.

Diversity is mixing groups based on obvious factors: race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion and income. It also includes political identity, company department, profession, education, place in the hierarchy, sports clubs, post codes and so on. All of these areas could be the basis for discrimination and can make people treat each other badly.

Our differences are real and good, says Kline. To think well about almost any topic we need to be in an a real, and therefore diverse, setting as possible. Or, the mind works best in the presence of reality. Reality is diverse (Kline, 2011).

Often decisions affecting the largest number of people in our society are made by homogenous groups. The profession of homoeopathy has a blatant example of this. In 2015, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) released an official statement about homoeopathy. A working committee was formed to consider the information and submissions. The committee excluded any homoeopaths, despite recommendations by the Australian Homoeopathic Association. It appears that they wanted a homogenous group that would validate their limiting assumption of the profession of homoeopathy. Had they selected a group of diverse thinkers, a more true and realistic definition would have emerged.

Mastering Diversity

Mastering diversity encompasses learning to cherish our differences. To master diversity, we can challenge our own limiting assumptions and also the limiting assumptions the world has made about minority groups.

Once you have a grasp about the value of diversity in the Thinking Environment, simple things can change family or group culture in a profound way. For example, when you need to discuss a topic, invite people to the meeting from diverse backgrounds and professions. In a team, this could mean inviting people from all aspects of the hierarchy. And then give them equality and attention and the opportunity to think for themselves. In this way, the discussion can free thinking to reach ideas that may not have been possible in a more monogamous group.

This ties in with our understanding of the unprejudiced observer in homoeopathic case-taking and homoeopaths' often closed mindedness with divergent approaches to homoeopathic prescribing. Fearing diversity does not enhance the quality of thinking within the homoeopathic community. Of course, the component of information is critical within this, to ensure the fundamental principles of homoeopathy are retained.

Incisive Questions

Kline has discovered that assumptions that limit our thinking can be removed with a question. She has developed a system that requires you to first notice the problem, then to find the limiting assumption and finally replace it with a freeing one.

Incisive questions get your mind fired up again. They work because they '*cut to the core*'

(Kline, 2011). Kline also tells us that '...right inside an incisive question lies the liberation of the human mind (2011).

In Kline's work, she has identified three kinds of assumptions:

- Facts
- Possible facts
- Bedrock assumptions about the self and about how life works.

Kline maintains that assumptions drive everything – good and bad. She says that virtually everything we do, think and feel begins with an assumption. If this is true, then it makes the Incisive Question essential if we want to liberate our thinking and our mind.

Mastering Incisive Questions

Kline tells us that the question should be simple. It's also important that the question is from the thinker. To have someone else formulate your incisive question for you simply does not cut through. Kline postulates that it is the construction of this question that may be the way the mind breaks through blocks.

To master this component, further learning is required. However, the power of the incisive question is profound. To illustrate the point, I will share a personal example. Last year, after a change of financial circumstance, I had to make a decision to return to full time nursing or continue to build my practice and pick up a few extra shifts. I was frozen with the decision and everything felt blocked. I couldn't plan or move forward. My incisive question was "If you knew that you are exactly where you are meant to be, what would you now do?" Well, that liberated my thinking and I knew exactly how to move forward again.

Place

The component of place is the creating of a physical environment that says back to people YOU MATTER. This is directly relevant to the homoeopathic clinic. From the moment people make an enquiry, to entering the clinic space and the way homoeopaths engage, everything needs to say to the clients 'you matter'.

In Kline's work, she has come to realise that when the physical environment affirms people's importance, they think at their best. It is not about the physical appearance of the space necessarily. It is the atmosphere created that makes people feel welcome and that they matter.

Kline also teaches that your body also needs to know 'you matter'.

"It needs to be healthy, robust, guilt-free, as reflective as possible of your true self, of what you value and espouse. It needs to show that you respect it and take care with it and are not in denial about it... you will think better if you are in a good relationship with your body. If you can face it with pride, knowing you do everything you know to show it that it matters, your thinking will improve. Your body is your temple. Your body is where you take place. It is where you think and feel and act (Kline, 2011).

Homœopaths need to lead by example, by taking this approach with regards to self care.

Mastering Place

When choosing a space for thinking, coaching, meetings or homœopathic practice, choose a physical place that welcomes people and that is accessible, comfortable, and professional and the décor whispers, You Matter.

Communication about the event or appointment is paramount, to ensure people know exactly where they are going, how to get there, the correct day and time, transport and parking options and availability of catering options. Before you even meet, people get the sense that you have put a lot of care into the arrangements and making them feel valued from the outset.

On arrival, greet people warmly, connect with attention to eye contact and hand shake if appropriate. Further providing access to amenities and refreshments all says 'you matter'.

Final Thoughts

Homœopathic case-taking is a unique and deeply psychotherapeutic experience for clients. The time allowed gives people the opportunity to fully express the nature of their dis-ease and time for the practitioner to perceive the underlying cause of their state. To date, our model of care for case-taking originates from Samuel Hahnemann's unprejudiced observer. As we evolve as practitioners, it's important to develop

reflective practice skills to enhance our ongoing practitioner development. One of the ways to do that is to analyse the models of care in use. Nancy Kline's Thinking Environment is a system of communication, the Ten Components of which correlate with the homœopathic 'way of being' in the consultation, hence is one such potential model. By further understanding and immersion into these components, there is the potential to bring new awareness and to even transform human interactions, both personally and professionally.

References:

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NOTE:

For anyone who would like to experience the Thinking Environment, come and join me at the AHMC 2016 in Brisbane for an intimate workshop.

