

Archetypal perspective in the analytical psychology of Jung and its relevance for the practice of education

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Abstract:

The collective unconscious finds expression in our minds in several ways, but among these, archetypes are the most central to Jung's theory. According to Jung, inherited images in the collective unconscious that shape our perceptions of the external world are Archetype. The teacher who understands the student-teacher archetype, and who is most in touch with the archetypal nature of not only his profession but his very psyche, is also bound to be an influential teacher. Their relationship is an archetypal event- just as "bride," "groom," and "marriage" are an archetypal situation; or just as "doctor," "patient," and "healing"; or "parent," "child," and "family" are. By taking the best of the conservative and liberal views of culture, teachers can help students grow into adults who, attaining the maximum degree of integration in them, can promote integration in their families, communities, and cultures.

Key-Words: *Intellectualism, Spiritual, psychotherapy, Archetypal.*

Introduction:

Carl Jung established the field of analytical psychology, and thus became known as, the "Father of Modern Analytical Psychology". Educational psychology is the branch of psychology concerned with the scientific study of human learning. The study of learning processes, from both cognitive and behavioral perspectives, allows researchers to understand individual differences in intelligence, cognitive development, affect, motivation, self-regulation, and self-concept, as well as their role in learning. The field of educational psychology relies heavily on quantitative methods, including testing and measurement, to enhance educational activities related to instructional design, classroom management, assessment, which serve to facilitate learning processes in various educational settings across the

lifespan. For much of the twentieth century, the work of Eduard Lindeman has informed educational theory and practice in efforts with adult populations. Adult education discussion groups rooted in his contributions foster democratic ideals by advancing free and focused inquiry into controversial issues of pressing concern to adults. Active inquiry forms the core of these adult education activities through analysis of personal, social and political presuppositions which may be changed as a result of such questioning. In spite of the merits of such procedures, a blind spot exists.

Jung's notion of the archetype has proven difficult for many people to grasp. There are probably several reasons for this. First, Jung was a psychiatrist, not an academic.

Implications for Education:

1. The Teacher–Student Relationship is Archetypal

Perhaps the first thing to note about Jung's view of education is that he felt that *educational processes are themselves archetypal*. By this he did not *only* mean that the teacher could help the student discover archetypal truths in the subject matter but also that *“the teacher” and “the student” are themselves archetypal figures*.

The interaction between teacher and student is woven so deeply into the fabric of what it means to be a human being that it is impossible to conceive of the human situation without it. Throughout our lives, we are involved in educational acts - as teachers, students, and often both. No human culture has ever been founded or perpetuated without education about everything from how the universe came into being to how to prepare a meal. Something so fundamental to creating and sustaining individuals and cultures is necessarily archetypal.

The powerful archetypal significance of education is evidenced in the centrality of the archetypes of the Wise Old Man and Wise Old Woman, which are at the very top of Jung's list of the most historically prominent archetypes (1967b, 390-391). The Wise Old Man and Woman show up in many myths, religions and dreams, often in connection with a young hero or heroine who is engaged in a dangerous journey in order to accomplish a great but difficult task. At the beginning of the journey, the hero crosses a threshold into a perilous forest, desert, or jungle. This symbolizes the hero's acceptance of the challenge to leave childish



things behind and to master those difficulties that will lead to both personal and transpersonal growth (Campbell 1949).

Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he entralls and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and transitory into the realm of the ever-enduring. He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night. (Jung 1966, 82)

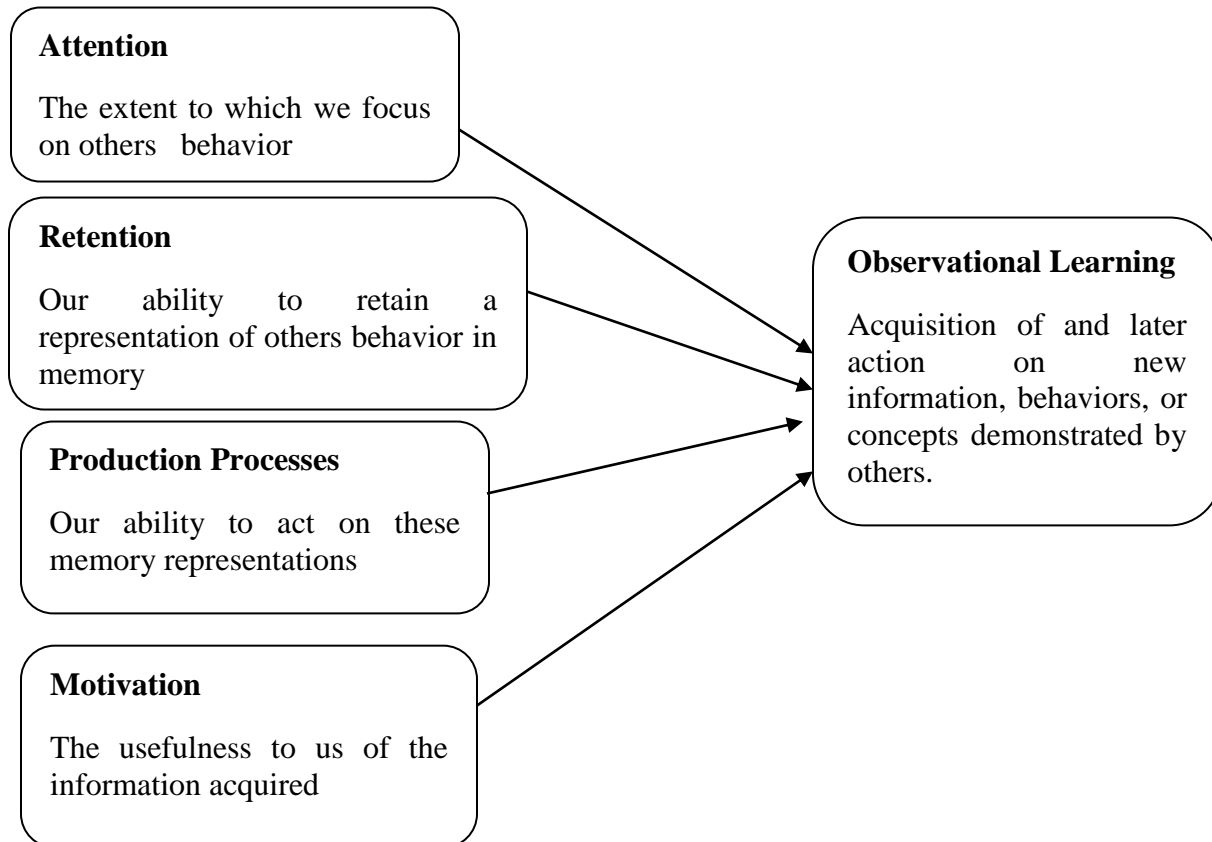
2. Education Should Not be Reduced to Technical Rationality

Considering Jung's view of education as being an inherently archetypal and therefore potentially sacred act, it will probably not

surprise the reader to learn that he objected to any approach to teaching and observational learning that was essentially technical in its means and goals. A physician and a pragmatist, Jung undoubtedly understood that education has legitimate technical goals. However, these must be secondary to the primary goal of deepening the student psychologically, politically, and morally. "It cannot be the aim of education," Jung declared in terms reminiscent of the American Progressives of the first half of the 20th century, to turn out rationalists, materialists, specialists, technicians and others of the kind who, unconscious of their origins, are precipitated abruptly into the present and contribute to the disorientation and fragmentation of society" (quoted in Frey-Rohn 1974, 182).

Key factors in observational learning

Observational learning is affected by several factors or sub processes. The most important of these are summarized here.



An educational system that exists simply to service the needs of a consumer society and its military-industrial machinery is not only inimical to the delicate archetypal dynamics of the student-teacher relationship but, in the final analysis, also socially *destabilizing*, despite its grand social-efficiency claims. Why is this? It is because such forms of education do not address the whole child in all of his physical, emotional, political,

cultural, and ethical complexity. The result is psychic “disorientation and fragmentation” in children, which will lead with tragic inevitability to the same result in a society whose citizens and leaders those children will one day become. It is this type of “social efficiency” curriculum (Kliebard 1995) that was championed in such documents as the *A Nation at Risk* report (1983), which reflected the essential nature



of many federal educational “reform” agendas in the last 100 years (Tyack 1974).

3. Education should not be Mere “Intellectualism”

A great scholar, Jung understood the life of the mind. Nevertheless, he was adamant about the danger of relying overmuch upon reason and the intellect. Certainly, rationality- and the classical forms of education meant to encourage it-are important. However, for Jung it was an article of faith that the mystery of how and why the psyche and, indeed, the entire universe operate as they do far exceeds mere reason and materialistic explanations. Like Kant, whom he studied as a very young man and deeply admired throughout his life, Jung believed that although reason provides an indispensable lens through which we see and interpret ourselves and the universe, it is, in the final analysis, simply *one* lens among many. It may *portray* a thing in terms that we can understand, but we must not fall into the trap of believing that those terms necessarily describe the ultimate *reality* of the “thing-in-itself.”

4. Teachers and Students Can Explore Archetypal Dimensions of Subject Matter

In a curriculum sensitive to Jungian perspectives, there should be an ongoing endeavor to discover in any subject in the curriculum its archetypal roots and fruits. This project is not only educationally possible but necessary because “the greatest and best thoughts of man shape themselves upon ... primordial images as upon a blueprint” (Jung 1953, 69). In order to get to the heart of an idea, theory, model, or piece of art, therefore, it is necessary to penetrate its archetypal infrastructure. This is not to say that the archetypal approach will always be the primary educational goal. However, even when the archetypal perspective is not the core of a curriculum, it may still enliven the analysis of virtually any subject.

Rudolf Steiner’s Waldorf Schools admirably accomplish this aim from kindergarten through 12th grade. Throughout a Waldorf education, the teacher organizes much of the curriculum around archetypal images that have been drawn from an array of religious, cultural, and artistic traditions and periods (Troostli 1988). Even basic math is studied in archetypal terms in early Waldorf education.

When the teacher and student view their subject in this light-looking for the archetypal rhizome beneath the ever-shifting scenery of particular events and situation, as Jung once put it (1963)-they are engaged in an archetypal study of history.

5. The Symbolic Domain and Intuitive Function are Educationally Crucial

Jung once said that concepts are ultimately stiff and empty things, like coins used to buy food, but symbols are the bread of life itself. Because Jung always stood in awe of the finally inscrutable mystery of things, he insisted that symbols can bring us much closer than theoretical speculation to those timeless truths which are able to satisfy our hearts. A Jungian theory of education emphasizes helping the student engage with his world in richly symbolic terms. A symbol stimulates our ability to intuit a reality that transcends mere ratiocination. It points beyond itself.

Thus, unlike the typical politically motivated cries for educational reform through the imposition of standardized testing, which always cast art and literature to the edges, a Jungian curriculum stresses them. “The

great secret of art...and the creative process”

Jung (1966, 82) observed:

consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find the way back to the deepest springs of life....

Educationists and politicians who worship the standardized test will therefore always look upon intuition with great suspicion because it can be neither controlled nor predicted- those two great aims of “scientism” and business. Thus, it is timely to heed Jung’s (1971, 63) reminder that:

not the artist alone, but every creative individual whatsoever owes all that is greatest in his

life to fantasy. The dynamic principle of fantasy is play, a characteristic also of the child, and as such it appears inconsistent with the principle of serious work. But without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable.

6. Failure can be Constructive

Although a Jungian view of education emphasizes nurturing the student, this does not mean that she should live in a risk-free environment. One gets the feeling in reading some of the literature on teaching- as-care that it has taken the idea of nurturance too far, not allowing the student to learn how to overcome those intellectual and ethical obstacles that are necessary for growth. However, it is one of the most crucial axioms of Jungian psychology that all energy “can proceed only from the tension of opposites” (1953, 29).

The student who is perpetually shielded against the developmentally necessary reality of occasional failure must ultimately succumb to a kind of psychic entropy. Or, to put it in archetypal terms, the student in a classroom whose teacher has over-identified with the archetype of the Great Mother (and this may be a male teacher as well as a female one) will ultimately find himself rocked into a moral and intellectual stupor in that teacher’s excessively protective embrace. Every archetype has both a bright and dark side. The shadow of the Great Mother is the Devouring Mother, the caregiver who will not let her children go

but instead spins such a web of care around them that she paralyzes them.

Not every failure in a classroom is healthy, of course. The teacher must handle the student’s failure in a constructive, nonpunitive manner, patiently helping the student see how she fell short and what together they can do to help her reach her full potential in a given area, however great or limited that potential may turn out to be. This kind of wisely handled failure leading to eventual success differs greatly from the student’s impersonal and humiliating experience of failure on standardized tests. As in parenting, the best teaching strategies are neither *authoritarian* (as in standardized testing) nor *permissive* (as in an overly nurturing style of teaching). They are *authoritative*, blending judgment (the archetypally paternal) and care (the archetypally maternal) (Brophy 1994).

7. Education has a Legitimate Therapeutic Function

Since the beginning of modern developmental psychology with G. Stanley Hall’s (1904) text, *Adolescence*, educationists have tried to apply the findings of psychological research and practice. The

very idea of a “developmentally appropriate curriculum” is already an attempt to shape pedagogy around children’s evolving psychic issues and interests. The junior high school, for instance, was established in order to help students make the psychologically difficult transition from early childhood to adolescence and, as such, is inherently a “therapeutic” institution (Tyack 1974). The highly significant document produced by the NEA in 1918, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, defined the public high school as a tool for psychosocially molding children during adolescence.

August Aichhorn (1965) a prominent Freudian psychiatrist of adolescence, argued that every teacher should know at least the fundamentals of psychoanalysis so that she could apply them in the classroom. Margaret Naumburg, the founder of the Walden School movement, asked her teachers to undergo psychoanalysis (just as Freud and Jung required of analysts in training) so that the teachers could recognize and appropriately respond to their students’ psychosexual dilemmas (Cremin 1964).

And, of course, counseling and special education programs in colleges of education prepare people to play various therapeutic

roles in the schools. The current popularity of self-esteem-enhancing curricula and the literature on teaching-as-care show that many teachers continue to see their vocation in a therapeutic light. Indeed, the “teacher-as-therapist” is an image that some teachers think of when asked to reflect on the nature of their work with children (Mayes 2001).

8. Reflectivity is Key to Teacher Development

Because Jung placed great faith in and responsibilities on the teacher, he was a staunch advocate of the ongoing education of the teacher. Yet, unlike many of the positivist educationists of his day, Jung put very little stock in “training” prospective and practicing teachers to follow pre-packaged “methods”. For “in reality, everything depends on the man and little or nothing on the method” (Jung 1978, 79). The teacher’s moral character and psychological insight are what will really win or lose the day for him with his students.

The therapist and the educator are similar in that “psychotherapy has taught us that in the final reckoning it is not knowledge, not technical skill, that has a curative effect, but



the personality of the doctor. And it is the same with education: It presupposes self-education” (1954, 140). For Jung, this “self-education” consisted in what today is called “teacher reflectivity” (Bullough 1991; Mayes 1999).

In this process, the teacher examines and critiques himself and his practice in psychological and political terms to see if he is being as sensitive and fair with all of his students as he can be, or if he has unresolved issues or prejudices that are standing in the way. “The teacher should watch his own psychic condition, so that he can spot the source of trouble when anything goes wrong with the children entrusted to his care” (1954, 120).

9. Education Should be Both Culturally Conservative and Progressive

When it comes to the sociocultural aspects of education, Jung’s vision is a mix of cultural conservatism and radicalism. On the conservative side, Jung advocated a traditional humanities curriculum as part of the student’s schooling in the higher grades. He believed students should “have a regard for history in the widest sense of the word”

(1954, 144). And true to his conservative nature, Jung warned that “anything new should always be questioned and tested with caution, for it may very easily turn out to be only a new disease” (1954, 145). Besides, it is only by honoring the tried-and-true standards that have developed over time that we can rein in our instincts, many of which are, as Jung the psychiatrist well knew, psychologically and morally injurious to self and other (1969, 80).

A culture’s collective shadow is the flip-side of its conscious values (Odajnyk 1976). Jung (1953, 26) wrote:

If people can be educated to see the shadow side of their nature clearly, it may be hoped that they will also learn to understand and love their fellow men better. A little less hypocrisy and a little more self-knowledge can only have good results in respect for our neighbor; for we are all too prone to transfer to our fellows the injustices and violence we inflict upon our own natures.

When education helps the individual cast light on the shadow in himself and his culture, then, guarded against the seductive prejudices of *groupthink*, he can become an agent in making his culture more ethical (Samuels 2001, 23).

10. Education Can and Should Have a Spiritual Dimension

Jung's view of the interaction of spirituality and culture agrees with Paul Tillich's (1956, 103) famous pronouncement that "religion is the soul of culture and culture the form of religion." Every culture has "a highly developed system of secret teaching, a body of lore concerning the things that lie beyond man's earthly existence, and of wise rules of conduct" (Jung 1966, 96). It is from the archetypally fertile ground of these *fundamental narratives*, this "body of lore," that a society's civic and legal narratives and grow over the centuries (Bruner 1996). Berger (1967, 52) has highlighted how most cultures are grounded in their (sometimes unspoken) spiritual commitments, especially regarding mortality and the promise of an afterlife, for "every human society is, in the last resort, men banded together in the face of death.

Despite the fashionable but incorrect academic truism that (post)modern life is "profane" or "desacralized," most historians and sociologists of religion note that spirituality, in both its institutional and strictly personal forms, is as important now

to most people as it ever was—and perhaps even more so (Marty 1987; Nord 1995). This inextinguishable personal and cultural need to connect with the transcendent and to live in its light is a universal urge for individuals and peoples. As long as we must personally and collectively face what T. S. Eliot (1971, 6) called "the overwhelming questions" of our morality and mortality, spiritual commitment is bound to be a significant issue for most people. Any approach to education that ignores this ethical and cultural imperative to live in the light of transpersonal truth is inadequate. This is why, for Jung, a theory of either therapy or education that does not take spirituality into account must ultimately fail. For not only are archetypes inherently spiritual but *spirituality is itself an archetype*, a basic human need and capacity. In both the consulting room and classroom, spirituality must be honored and explored as the pivotal emotional, social, and intellectual force that it is. Furthermore, *morality is an archetype*, not just a social invention or sexual displacement as Freud held. Students naturally want to explore moral issues in their studies; they will feel bored and short-

changed if they cannot. Ethical questions and systems are:

a function of the human soul, as old as humanity itself. Morality is not imposed from outside; we have it in ourselves from the start-not the law, but our moral nature without which the collective life of human society would be impossible. That is why morality is found at all levels of society. It is the instinctive regulator of action.... (Jung 1953, 27)

Tillich (1959) said that in the last analysis everyone has ethical and spiritual commitments because everyone has “ultimate concerns.” A Jungian approach allows us to envision a pedagogy which helps students explore those ultimate concerns in a way that is spiritually sensitive without being theologically dogmatic or denominationally partisan.

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