I recently read a couple of books and the contrast between them struck me. One was a well known book about music education and philosophy; the other was a book about science and the theory of chaos. Both devoted considerable attention to creativity, consciousness, musical examples, and “the self.” The contrast was in the “tone” and “humanity” of the writing.

In the music education book, the words that jumped out at me were “judgment,” “excellence,” “criticism,” “cognitive,” “praxial,” “thinking in action,” “attention,” “practice,” “knowledge,” “expertise.”

In the science book, they were “subtlety,” “blossomed,” “transformation,” “complexity,” “aha!” “mystery,” “spontaneity,” “harmonized,” “wholeness,” “beauty.”

What is the “tone” of our classrooms? What makes a lasting difference in people’s lives is not so much the curricular content but the emotional content. To thwart and stunt “self-growth” the emotional tone in our classes need not be harsh and angry, only driven by the pursuit of excellence at the expense of human response. Where is the beauty, the wonder, the transformation, the wholeness?