Practicing Seeing Systems

A great way to practice seeing systems is to read the newspaper with a systems view. As you read the articles, see if you can spot systems characteristics. Sometimes the article might highlight the systems view, but most often those aspects will go unnoticed.

See if you can spot:

- **Web vs. box thinking**: are the boundaries large enough to account for all the important factors? In rare cases, the boundaries of consideration may be too large, but more often the boundaries are too small.
- **Self-organization:** what interactions are producing which patterns?
- **Feedback loops:** often you will notice that balancing feedback is being ignored and a system is falling into dysfunction.
- **Opportunities to practice depth-perception** by popping between system levels: look at what's good for the cell and what's good for the body, or what's good for the individual and what's good for society. Notice if the article gets stuck in just one view.
- **Coherence**: is the story about behavior that privileges a sub-system over the larger system that includes the sub-system?

When you've analyzed an article, write a synopsis that includes the information that you've gleaned using the systems view.

Then, write any suggestions, remedies, or system interventions you might have concerning the issues covered in the article. Compare your suggestions with the approach typically taken concerning the issue. Notice if there are any differences.

Not every article will lend itself to this exercise, but if you look through the paper, you are bound to notice a few that will be appropriate. Depending on the stories you come across, it may be easy or it may be surprisingly difficult! Practice is a must. It takes time to get used to seeing interconnectedness and not just separate things.