

Promoting Learning & Discipline

by **Dr. Marvin Marshall**

DESCARTES' ERROR:

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I think; therefore, I am.

"I think; therefore, I am" is perhaps the most famous statement in the history of philosophy. The statement by Rene Descartes, first written in 1637, still has a significant influence on our thinking in the 21st century.

The statement is the foundation of Cartesian dualism that separates the brain from the body. In his book, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Antonio Damasio challenges Descartes' pronouncement.

Damasio, a Portugese-born M.D. and Ph.D., professor of and head of the department of neurology at the University of Iowa College of Medicine and adjunct professor at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California, is the recipient of scores of scientific honors and prizes. He is internationally recognized for his research on the neurology of vision, memory, and language along with his contributions to the understanding of Alzheimer's disease.

He contrasts the brain (neurological) with the mind (psychological) and postulates that the brain, body, and mind are so interwoven by collections of systems that they cannot be separated.

Contrary to traditional scientific opinion, Damasio provides convincing evidence that feelings cannot be separated from cognition. In fact, our emotions significantly effect our thinking. If you stop to reflect on this concept, it becomes rather obvious. Do you do better when you feel good or when you feel bad?

The same holds true when we punish students. Punishments engender negative feelings that immediately create poor teacher-student relationships. A significantly more effective approach is to help the student establish a procedure that would redirect impulsive behaviors. An example can be found at <http://www.MarvinMarshall.com/impulsemanagement.html>.

Damasio also postulates that internal communications are image-based. This is especially dear to me since my approach is based on communicating positive images. An example of this is the Primary Poster for elementary teachers at <http://www.MarvinMarshall.com/aquickstart.htm>.

Damasio gives the example that many people fear flying more than driving in spite of the fact that a rational calculation of risk unequivocally demonstrates that we are far more likely to survive a flight between two given cities than a car ride between the same two cities. The difference, by several orders of magnitude, favors flying over driving. And yet most people FEEL safer driving than flying. The reason may be that we allow the image of a plane crash, with its emotional drama, to dominate the landscape of our reasoning and to generate a negative bias against the correct choice.

Using neurology, Damasio supports two basic foundations of my *Raise Responsibility System* that promotes both learning and responsible behavior:

1. **Principle:** A change in behavior is as much emotion-based as it is cognition-based.
Practice: Speak to students in positive terms--rather than using approaches that prompt negative feelings.
2. **Principle:** The human mind thinks in pictures, images, and visions.
Practice: To influence people to change behavior, empower them with positive images--rather than overpowering them with negative ones.

Ideas for implementing the discipline system that promotes both responsibility and learning using concepts of **proaction** (Stephen Covey), **noncoercion** (William Glasser), **collaboration** and **empowerment** (W. Edwards Deming) and **hierarchy** and **autonomy** (Abraham Maslow) is described at <http://www.MarvinMarshall.com>

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