

THE INTERACTIVE METHOD

*THE PATH OF HEALING
THROUGH EMPATHY AND COMPASSION*

COMBINED EDITION

VOLUME ONE: THE PROCESS

VOLUME TWO: APPLICATIONS

VOLUME THREE: OUT OF THE PRACTICE

JANET KLEIN, PSY.D.

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An Experiential Lexicon and a Glossary for Focusing-based Practices

Why an experiential lexicon?

When exploring an experiential terrain, we need to define things from the inner experiencing of the journey. We need a new kind of dictionary, what I call an *experiential lexicon*. We need a way of knowing from the experience that forms inside of ourselves so we can communicate this meaningfully with others, but most importantly, so we can communicate this meaningfully with ourselves at a level that transcends a simple intellectual knowing.

In the section marked "right attitude," I describe an exercise asking the workshop participants to find a meaningful word using only their "head." I then ask them to take that same word down inside to the center of the body, to the bodysense (see definition number 5), and to see what forms. The experience is remarkably different when the meaning is obtained using the bodysense.

Experiential learning is significantly different from other forms of learning. It becomes obvious that we need an experiential lexicon both to describe the experience itself and to allow the experience to be captured and held at the level at which it has been experienced. This way we can come closest to putting symbols around the non-word event. The forming of the description itself is integral to not only the capturing but to the moving forward of the experience.

Glossary of terms-

I have also included a *glossary of terms* that is more descriptive than experiential. These are terms that aren't in common usage and may be foreign to people newly exploring the world of Focusing. Some of these terms are new constructions because some of the experiencing I am naming, and other people have already named, are newly formed, newly described or come at from a new, imaginative and creative direction. A concise glossary is meant to be helpful in approaching the practice of and in absorbing Focusing, Interactive Focusing and Compassionate, Empathic Listening.

Not jargon-

The lexicon and glossary are attempts to show that Focusing-based practices aren't shrouded in jargon. Rather there is much that is new presented here that simply needs fresh descriptions or is using established words and terms in new ways, for example, the word Focusing itself. While there is a similarity to focusing the lens of a camera so an image will come clear, the novelty of applying this to our inner vision is both jarring and freeing. It surprises us to know of a focusing technique that will allow our inner experience to come into clear relief. It frees us to know that there is a

process by which we can look inside of ourselves to gain clarity and to challenge confusion, to touch an illusive place and to grasp it to the extent that we can form an image clear enough to make sense of and to speak from.

About the experiential lexicon and the glossary of terms-

Since the experiential lexicon and glossary of terms are intended to be read as an article, it is arranged not in alphabetical order, but in a mix of the order of importance, encounter and need. There is a hope that your reading this article will result in your internalizing and metabolizing the lexicon and glossary as an experience itself, that it will help you form your own, inside-of-you and unique but sharable experiential lexicon.

For the experiential lexicon, I will suggest exercises to evoke the intended experiential definition. By performing the exercise, I hope you will actually have the experience for which the exercise was designed.

In the glossary of terms, I will try to be as descriptive as possible to present you the opportunity to gain the clearest knowing of these terms.

All the while I write this, I realize it is just a first step and one that will leave you at the surface of the potential for experiencing. Hopefully, you will have the chance to dip down and fully experience the three main processes I am exploring: Focusing; Compassionate, Empathic Listening and Interactive Focusing.

The order of things-

First I will describe four basic terms: 1. Experience and the experiencing of experience, 2. Focusing, 3. Compassionate, Empathic Listening and 4. Interactive Focusing. Then I will lead you through exercises to evoke the experience of: 5. The bodysense, 6. The right environment, 7. The right attitude and 8. Discerning: three basic sets. The glossary of terms will include: 9. The building blocks, 10. The storyteller-as-teacher or Focuser-as-teacher, 11. Experiential teaching, 12. Experiential learning and 13. Experiential, healing listening.

Four basic terms-

1. Experience and the experiencing of experience:

There are two separate and related things here. I don't want to get overly complicated and tie this up in philosophical knots, but I do want to give a base-line definition for "experience." Experience has to do with our life events, intangible as well as tangible. When events occur in our lives, there is a way through a complex of modes that we take these in. We take them in with our senses, we make meaning of them with our mind-body, we feel them with our emotions, we are moved by them, we recognize them as units by themselves and we see their interconnection with what is already recorded inside of us. Experience is both

unto itself and part of our larger becoming. This is neither an exhaustive nor a precise description, but it is something to work with. Of course, at this juncture, I invite you to formulate your own experiential definition of experience

The experiencing of experience is not to just have the experience, nor is it only to become aware of having the experience, but it is to have the experience in such a way that the experience becomes part of your moving forward fabric. You process the experience and incorporate it meaningfully into yourself. It is the basis for growing in this moment and it is the foundation for further healthy growth. Truly experiencing the experience is being aware of it, digesting it, metabolizing it, sensing it fully, utilizing it in your living process, letting it guide you to your truths and letting it be the foundation for the building of a healthy self.

2. Focusing:

Focusing is a term introduced by Eugene Gendlin in his seminal work of the same name published by Bantam in 1978. Gendlin described a six-step process to help you come inside your body to allow you to discover and to speak from your own experience. Gendlin presented an integrated mind-body model. He identified the bodily felt sense which he called the direct referent which was typically located or most easily accessed in the trunk of your body. I will refer to the bodily felt sense as the bodysense throughout my writings. Through Gendlin's six-step Focusing process using your bodysense, you can get in touch with an unclear issue in your life and the way your body is carrying it in this moment. By working with your not yet clear issue in a Focusing way, you might actually bring that unclear, fuzzy issue into focus, hence the title Focusing.

The six steps of Focusing Gendlin identified are:

1. *Clearing a space* in your torso to make room to process an issue you are carrying in your life right now. This is a sequence of finding a bodysense for an issue you are holding bodily and gently clearing it out of your center. The issue might be about your marriage or your children or your job, and so forth. You may repeat this clearing several times until you have some open space in which to process the issue which most needs your attention now.
2. Getting a *bodysense* of an issue in your life that you are carrying in a *tangible* way in your body in the current moment, the issue that seems most pressing. This might be a squeezing sensation or tingly or sharp, and the like. The place in your body that is most typically where the bodysense appears is your torso, from your chin through your groin.
3. Getting a *handle* by which to carry or summarize or represent the bodysense of that emerging issue. You are aware of this sensation

in your center. This might be captured by a word, phrase, visual image or other sensory representation. You might actually get the handle word squeezing or sharp or tingly to describe the bodysense of an issue, for example, about needing to make a decision about taking a new job. Or you might get the sensation as if you were standing unsure-footedly at the top of a steep hill.

4. *Resonating* or checking back and forth *between the handle and the bodysense* to see if the handle really fits or captures the felt sense you are carrying bodily in that moment. Does squeezing and sharp and tingly and standing atop a steep hill really get how your inside place is holding your indecision about taking a new job?
5. Posing a question, *asking*, for instance, what is that squeezing or tingly or sharp, what is that all about? You might get that it is about the job decision, but you might get a sense that there is more there. You might want to put out the question, "What is that squeezing, sharp, tingly, unsure-footed feeling all about when I get in touch with my trouble making my job decision?"
6. *Receiving* whatever came during the process. Welcoming and being thankful for whatever unsticking, whatever movement or shift that came...the gift of the process. You may recognize that though you got a step, you need to process this job-decision issue further. It is helpful to spend an additional moment to mark where you are right now in the process so you might return to this place should you have need to.

Focusing alone and Focusing with a partner-

While Gendlin's six-step Focusing process is intended as a *personal, inner exploration*, a way of going inside and getting in touch with your own issues, early on Gendlin paired up Focusers with listeners. The listeners used a method of listening developed and popularized by Carl Rogers, the founder of the client-centered movement of psychotherapy. This listening is a form of active listening and is comprised of reflective responses, whereby the listener mirrors back the statements of the person revealing the story. In this way, Focusing developed from a personal pursuit into a *partnership*. You explored your issues using the Focusing process, and now you had a facilitator in the form of a listener-partner.

The partnership was balanced in that the Focuser might be listened to for half an hour, for instance, and then the partners would switch roles so the listener would have an equal time to Focus and to be listened to. This exchange or partnership is what I call a transactional process in that the

listener never brought his own material into the listening, and when the switch occurred, the new Focuser addressed her own issues which typically didn't intersect with or comment on the first Focuser's material.

3. Compassionate, empathic listening – healing listening:

All ways of listening aren't created equal. An important way of listening is to use experiential listening, listening from your own inner bodysense to hear the experience-bearing part or the crux of what the storyteller is saying. The listener reflects the crux back to the storyteller so she can resonate it against her bodysense to see if it is accurate, to see if that is what she intended, to see whether the listener really got what she said and to see if something has shifted or moved forward. The storyteller can use the resonating to give the listener feedback about the accuracy and quality of her listening.

This kind of listening is intentional listening in that the listener actually intends to be both compassionate and empathic. It is the storyteller who can keep the listener on track with feedback about whether she feels heard empathically and compassionately. It is the listener who can respond to the feedback in a way that brings his listening closer to the expressed needs of the storyteller in terms of accuracy, empathy and compassion. This helps insure that experiential listening includes empathy and compassion which are the hallmarks and linchpins both of this kind of listening and the Interactive Focusing process in which this kind of listening is used.

This differs significantly from active listening, and it extends beyond experiential listening itself. I call this kind of bodysense-to-bodysense listening *healing listening* as it is an empowered storyteller who gets to experience empathy and compassion from her listener, and she gets the opportunity to develop self-empathy and self-compassion.

4. Interactive Focusing:

In the section on Focusing, I described two developmental stages Focusing has already undergone. Intrapersonal Focusing is stage one. Transactional Focusing (Focusing exchanges or Focusing partnerships) is stage two. Interactive Focusing is, to me, the third developmental stage of Focusing.

Interactive Focusing adds the component of the interaction. Finally we use the Focusing process, perhaps one of the truly great and deep processes of all times, to not only build relationships, but to build truly great and deep relationships. The participants actually acknowledge and share what comes for them during a session. This is a new part, something that wouldn't happen in intrapersonal Focusing for it was done alone, and something that was guarded against in transactional Focusing – as one of the intents of the

model was to keep the participants' processes separate. The listener actually took pains while listening not to let any of her own material intrude.

Interactive Focusing is a way of communicating where the storyteller tells her story from the bodysense of her experience. It asks the listener to use compassionate, empathic listening as described above. The model follows this form:

1. The storyteller tells a piece of her *story*.
2. The listener *reflects* the crux of it back to the storyteller.
3. The storyteller *resonates* it both to help move her story forward and to give the listener feedback as needed.
4. The listener *responds* to the feedback.
5. When the storyteller feels she has completed a piece of the story, taking perhaps three to five minutes, both parties, the storyteller as well as the listener, take a moment together to be sure they have heard the story with empathy and compassion. They share what came for them in this *empathic moment* which we call the *double (both parties) empathic moment*.
6. It is then time for the *roles to reverse*. The storyteller becomes the new listener and the first listener becomes the new storyteller.
7. The new storyteller may share two things with the new listener during what is called the *interactive response*,
 - a. if appropriate, how the new storyteller now feels for or about her partner after hearing her story and
 - b. how what the first storyteller shared touches the new storyteller, what of his own material this touches.
8. The process continues in rounds of 1-7 until both participants feel complete.
9. The *interactive closing* is the place where each participant checks in to see:
 - a. how she now feels about her partner at this new juncture
 - b. how she now feels about herself

Then a moment is taken to *receive* what came.

These are the mechanics of it. The intention of the Interactive Focusing model is to allow people to develop empathy and compassion; to speak and listen from their bodysense while maintaining an attitude of empathy and compassion; to allow deep connection and intimacy by using this process; to acknowledge how, interactively, one person's story touches the other person; to grow through relationship and to allow people to discover and to tell their truths in a safe and caring environment.

This is an experiential process which means that as the participants get in touch with their experience something new is growing and forming in them from the experience itself. Because each person's experience is unique, sharing the experience empathically, that is, both parties trying to empathically understand the experience, helps them to maintain contact which opens to connection and intimacy.

The experiential lexicon:

5. The bodysense:

There is a place in us in which is seated a special way of knowing our world. Eugene Gendlin explored this and named this special place of inner knowing the bodily felt sense or the direct referent. I call it the *bodysense*. It is a complex of knowings. It is more than a feeling or an emotion or a head knowing or an intuition or a physical sensation. It is all these things and more. It is all about "that thing;" it is the whole of that angry situation, or it is all about that scary thing that grips us. It isn't just the single dimension of the anger or the fear. Memory most likely will be included as well as our habitual way of experiencing and responding. It is how all of this is carried in the body in the present moment. Because it is carried in the body, it is an in-the-moment phenomenon, which, by definition, helps debride the experience of ghosts, ghouls and other dead matter.

It is truly tangible. For instance, when we check down inside we may sense a soft and teary and, maybe, a little shaky place. When we touch into that we may get that it is about being scolded by a spouse and how little and helpless you might feel as an adult when that happens. And the red flush of shame might creep in telling you that you don't want to feel that way any more. You don't want to let yourself feel shame. And maybe you get that you have some angry energy, and you want to stand up to the scolding and say, "That isn't okay with me. I don't mind being corrected, but I do mind feeling scolded and shamed!" It is going down inside and identifying that special place and waiting there with it until it shares its knowings with you. It is having a "you" that can touch into the bodysense, be with it, listen to it and let it reveal itself.

A familiar situation where you might recognize your bodysense is when you are at work and you get a gnawing feeling in your stomach that won't let you alone. It is two o'clock, and your stomach is feeling empty because you worked right through lunch on an important project to meet a deadline, but you know that it isn't the hunger. You realize that it is the sense that you have forgotten something, something important. And suddenly it hits you. You were supposed to meet your mother for lunch to help plan a surprise party for

your father's birthday. Ugh! And at the same time, aha! Even though you haven't "fixed" the situation, there is a relief from the gnawing, a shift in the way you are now carrying it. You now know what it is all about.

The approach exercise:

A simple exercise that helps you locate your own bodysense is to ask a partner to slowly walk toward you while you monitor what is happening in your body with each step he takes. Establish that you can stop his approach at any time by saying, "Stop" or signaling with your hand. As you monitor inside yourself, is it getting tight, or shaky, or bubbly or jumpy? These bodysenses are there to tell you something. They are connected to our most primitive survival device, the fright – flight, fight, freeze mechanism. We all have it even if it is covered over in the moment. Just letting our awareness drop down inside our torso, from our chin to our lower abdomen, will help us access it.

6. The right environment:

What is the right environment in which to explore our issues, to uncover our secrets and to discover our truths? Each person needs to work this out for herself. For me, I need to feel safe, to feel that I can protect myself. I need to trust the person to whom I might be revealing myself. I want to be enveloped in a surround of empathy and compassion. I want to be able to ask this of my listener and to guide her to listen to me in the way I will feel empathically and compassionately heard. I want to learn to hold myself with self-empathy and self-compassion.

A further knowing from the approach exercise:

As your partner approached you, there may have been a moment, even an exact instant where you recognized that he had come just close enough. Perhaps you almost automatically raised your hand and said, "Stop." As you had agreed upon when you started the exercise, he stopped right at that spot.

Go back to that knowing place in your body at the instant you sensed he had advanced just far enough. What was happening inside? Check to see how you felt when you said, "Stop," and your partner immediately stopped. When I first did this exercise, there was a moment when I realized I was no longer breathing. This is when I said, "Stop." I got a sense of empowerment. I knew what I needed. I asked for it. I got it. This is part of the right environment. Keeping myself safe, feeling that I can protect myself and being with someone who will respect my wishes.

Take a moment to mark your own bodysense so you will know how to tell when you are feeling that you can keep yourself safe, you can protect yourself and that you can trust the person with whom you are processing.

7. The right attitude:

What is the right attitude to bring to listening? How do you want to be when you are listening to someone? How do you want your listener to be with you?

Right attitude exercise:

Take a moment to think of a word or phrase that captures how you want to listen or to be listened to. It might be a word like empathy, compassion, respect, non-judgmental, accepting, open, engaged, gently curious, from the heart, caring, prizing, and the like. These are all wonderful words and sentiments.

Now take a few deep breaths, relax, open a place in your center to receive the word or phrase you identified in your head. Take that word down inside and get a full bodysense of it. Let the sensations and images come. Resonate the word or image against the bodysense of it. See what emerges. A story might unfold. Just stay with that word, and see how your body holds it.

For me, the bodysense of the word was very different and infinitely more alive than just thinking the word and its meaning in my head. I took down inside the word empathy. In my head it was just a way I wanted to listen so I could get how the story was for the storyteller. I wanted to get an accurate picture of her world. When I took empathy down inside and got a bodysense of it, I got a glowing warmth and some soft teariness. I sensed a caring attached to empathy. There was a vibrancy and aliveness inside of me. I was surprised by all that came. From this exercise, I realize that I get a fullness with the bodysense that isn't there when I just think of how I should listen.

This is an exercise that I repeat throughout the day, just letting the bodysense of the way I want to be come inside of me. When you are listening and recognize that you have slipped away from your "right" way of listening, just take a moment to get back to it by calling back the bodysense of it. As you practice bodysensing your own right attitude it strengthens, and bringing it into your Focusing and listening is more reliable.

8. Discerning: three basic sets:

Discern means both to perceive by the senses or intellect and to recognize as distinct or different. I have three sets of words or phrases that are useful throughout your Focusing-listening practice. With each set I will ask you first to relax, clear a space in your center and then take the words or phrases down, one at a time in pairs. The pairs are *defended against* and *protected by*; *unsafe* and *uncomfortable*; and *criticism* and *feedback*. By setting one against the other, I hope something will come clear to you at the level of the

bodysense that will become a fundamental way of holding yourself during your lived experiences.

The exercise:

First take some deep breaths, relax and clear a space in your center to receive the phrase *defended against*. As you bring *defended against* down into your center, let the bodysense form around the phrase. Just wait and see what comes. Take a full minute of clock time here. Now take some more deep breaths to again open up your center. This time let the phrase *protected by* come down into your center. Again see what comes. Get the bodysense of it. Resonate the phrase *protected by* against the bodysense that has formed. See what more comes. Give this a full minute to move forward. When you are through, take a moment to say out loud or to yourself what came with each. If you are alone, you may want to journal this. If you are doing this in a group, you may want to each take a turn to share what came for you.

The next set of words is *unsafe* and *uncomfortable*. Please perform the exercise above substituting *unsafe* and *uncomfortable*. The last set of words is *criticism* and *feedback*. Again, please perform the exercise substituting *criticism* and *feedback*.

My own sharings: For *defended against*, I felt a masonry wall was constructed in front of me...or maybe I constructed it brick by brick. It kept my enemies out...and that felt good. It also kept my friends out...and that didn't feel good. But worst of all, it kept me inside, isolated and lonely. For *protected by*, I sensed myself being held or cradled by maternal arms...my own. I felt I could let myself be a vulnerable, young self at the same time I was a capable adult.

For *unsafe* I felt a deadly chill overtake me. I found myself frozen and had difficulty breathing. For *uncomfortable*, I felt squirmy...that I could move around a bit and find a better spot. It left me knowing that when I identify *unsafe* I will just say, "Stop or no!" When I identify *uncomfortable*, I know that this is a fertile area in which to work. There is something there that needs my attention, that is calling for me to process it. *Uncomfortable* points me in the direction I need to go, so I can use *uncomfortable* as a signpost.

For *criticism*, I got a sense of being shattered or fragmented or unglued. It was an ugly feeling. For *feedback*, I got a sense, "Yes, I am entitled to hear something constructive. I've worked hard for that!" It was important for me to get the difference between *criticism* and *feedback*, especially because I have always been so *criticism* sensitive. It let me see

that everything that comes at me isn't criticism. It also let me see that I could discern the difference and request feedback rather than criticism.

9. The building blocks:

The four basic building blocks are the tools I use to teach and practice Focusing and Interactive Focusing. The *four building blocks* are: 1) The right environment including safety and the right attitude, 2) The bodysense, 3) Compassionate, empathic listening from the bodysense and 4) The storyteller as the teacher. I have already described 1-3 so let me proceed to 4):

10. The storyteller-as-teacher:

The storyteller-as-teacher model rests in the assumption that the storyteller wants to be heard empathically and compassionately. It also rests in the assumption that the storyteller is her own best expert, that she knows how her world should have been and how it should be for her. And finally, it rests in the assumption that the best person to teach a listener to listen empathically and compassionately is the storyteller herself. Only she can take the listening back inside to check whether it has that experiential quality for her. Taking all these assumptions together it is but a small step to ask the storyteller to teach the listener "how" to be an empathic and compassionate listener.

The model is *simple* to learn, though *not always easy* to execute. While the model is simple, old listening habits can confound our implementing it. So...how can the listener listen empathically? By empathically, I mean that the listener is trying to experience the storyteller's world *as if* she were the storyteller. The listener is trying to shift around to the other side and see the storyteller's world through the storyteller's eyes. The listener really tries to sense in her own body how it is for the storyteller to carry all that is going on inside of her.

Empathy, ironically, as a way of maintaining boundaries-

This doesn't mean the listener loses her boundaries and becomes the storyteller. In fact, trying to get the other person's experience *as if* you were that other person enhances maintaining boundaries. It remains an *as if* experience, especially when it is set against your own bodysense that you are listening from inside of yourself – there is a you and there is the other person. This *bodysense-to-bodysense communication* helps explicate both our human similarities and our individual, unique differences. We become aware that we are similar, but we are not the same. We can understand through the common language of our humanity. We maintain our boundaries by our individual differences. The human experience is universal. Human beings are unique.

Empathy is an old concept and has been variously and often defined. I like the meaning from above, the *as if* experience. In spite of the plethora of

definitions and descriptions, there is still an insufficient explanation or “how to” be empathic. Here is where the obvious enters the picture. Isn’t it the teller of the story or *the storyteller who can best put the listener in touch with how the storyteller wants to be heard – with what feels empathic and compassionate to the storyteller?* Consequently, the storyteller is asked to teach the listener how to listen so the storyteller experiences the listening as empathic and compassionate.

The teaching comes in the form of feedback. The storyteller takes the listener’s reflective response back to the bodysense and resonates it for accuracy and fit. From the resonating, the storyteller is able to give the listener gentle feedback. The listener can adjust her responses accordingly.

The model-

1. The *storyteller speaks from her bodysense* about an issue in her life.
2. The listener listens from her *bodysense* and *selects* a reflective response.
3. The storyteller takes the listening response back to her bodysense and *resonates* it for accuracy and fit. Did the listener get it the way the storyteller intended it? Does more come? Does it shift?
4. The storyteller gives the listener *feedback* – “Yes, that’s it exactly,” or “No, I really needed you to hear the part about how heavy and sad it feels,” or “Something more is coming. Could you just sit with me quietly for a little,” or “It was just like that, but when I take back what you said it’s shifted. Now it’s....” It is this feedback that helps the listener gain accuracy, and lets the closeness of the empathic experience emerge, lets the empathic bond form. The storyteller’s sensing and asking for what she needs allows the empathy to form...and it is experienced as empowering.
5. The listener takes in the feedback and modifies her listening response from this feedback. This lets the storyteller sense the listener’s support and wanting to get it right, wanting to be empathic. Again, this allows the storyteller to have a sense of empowerment. Someone listened and responded to her feedback and requests.

11. Experiential teaching:

Experiential teaching a) uses experiential methods, b) teaches from an experience held in the body in the moment, c) is about the student’s own just experienced world, d) teaches from the learnings revealed by the experience itself which often includes more than the original, planned objective, e)

recognizes that each experience will have a unique manifestation in the student which makes each student's learning unique, f) requires all of the participants be in touch with their bodysense at all times, listening, learning and speaking from this place and g) in the case of Interactive Focusing teaches an experiential process.

The teacher designs the exercises to teach from a direct experience, orients the students to their bodysense, asks them to process their experience using their bodysense and asks them to speak and listen from the bodysense when sharing their experience. The exercise should evoke the learning the experience was intended to reveal...and more. Much of the teaching is done by the students' sharing their experiences and from the new learnings which have been revealed by their inner processing.

12. Experiential learning:

Experiential learning implies a certain thing to me. *I am using experiential learning to refer to the way we learn something from our own experience of it as it comes into focus or as it is revealed through our bodysense.* This is the simplest and most basic definition I can give experiential learning. It is body-mind based, and there is a going back and forth between the bodysense and the mind that allows things to come into Focus. It is implicit that those things we do not yet know are unclear, out of focus. It is through a Focusing process that we hope to bring our issues and truths, our knowings into focus. This relies on our becoming aware of our material and struggles, which include content as well as process, as it is carried in our bodysense moment by moment and working them forward in a Focusing way.

13. Experiential, healing listening:

For me, experiential listening stems from a special line of listening starting with the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, father of the client-centered movement in psychotherapy. What makes it special is the empowered position he accorded the client (formerly disempowered patient) or storyteller.

Rogers thought therapy (or change, growth and healing) was an *inner directed process*, that *the client was her own best expert*. Gendlin added that *inside of ourselves, we know how it should have been*. To me, these are *core beliefs* without which one can't listen experientially. Without these beliefs, one can listen in a variety of ways none of which adequately honors the experience of the storyteller. *For me, experiential listening is fundamentally finding a right way to listen to the experience of the storyteller without tampering with that experience in any way and by making room for the fullness, depth and truth of that experience to emerge.*

The logical progression from this line of reasoning is to find a way of listening to implement these core beliefs. The core beliefs militate against analyzing, interpreting, prescribing, telling, interrogating, protecting, rescuing, sermonizing....

So if you really believe that the client is her own best expert and that her knowing about how it should be for herself comes from within, how would you be with that client? Rogers chose reflective responding or mirroring which is the quintessence of non-intrusion. As far as it goes, I believe there is consistency between his belief and his practice.

Reflections as a way to listen for the experience: The beginnings of empathy-

What is the purpose of reflective responding? The reflection gives the storyteller a chance to take back inside what she just said, to slow down, to hear herself and to resonate the reflection for accuracy. Is that what she really intended to say? Is that what she meant?

She can check the listener to see if she feels the listener got it the way she meant it and the way she said it. She can give the listener feedback if she feels there is a non-match. Did the listener get back the crux of it? Did she reflect more than was needed? Did she understand? Did she get back the affective coloration, the tone, the tempo, the gesture, the variety of non-verbal communications which together with verbalizations really let someone feel they have been heard? And, of course, in the checking or resonating, this moves the process forward.

Beyond therapeutic listening...would Rogers agree?

Rogers attached three necessary and sufficient conditions to therapeutic listening: that the listener listen with empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard. I would add two more conditions to how to be with someone in a healing way. For me *empathy must be yoked with compassion* or unfortunate things can happen. Also, the listener needs to indicate an openness to receive *feedback from the storyteller* to insure the storyteller feels heard empathically and compassionately. This feedback empowers the storyteller while it aids the listener in performing what might otherwise be a lonely if not impossible task – to listen in just the “right” way and without a navigator.

Experiential listening is not enough-

Experiential-listening-with-empathy-and-compassion is a string of not only hyphenated but inseparable words which form a description of what *healing listening* is for me. At first, I simply wanted to describe experiential listening from the many years I have learned, practiced and taught it. Then I realized

that, on its own, experiential listening was just another method, albeit a very powerful one. We can listen experientially, however, without its being of mutual benefit. When we attach the conditions of empathy and compassion, we put ourselves in a right way to listen and to be listened to.

Healing listening-

*When the listener listens to and for the experience through empathy and compassion and when the storyteller is aware of wanting her experience to be listened to with empathy and compassion, the interaction takes on a whole new dimension. The storyteller's conscious knowing and checking for empathy and compassion in her listener and in herself brings her to a new place from which to grow toward wholeness. This is what I call **healing listening**. And all the while I believe we are practicing, learning, developing and growing in empathy and compassion.*

My own experience of being listened to in this way brings to me the discovery of more of my *self* and the repairing of those parts of my self that were damaged, that didn't have a chance to grow forward, that were bent down or covered over. As a listener, I find a commensurate benefit. I grow from the listening, my own world expands. And, of course, the connection between the listener and storyteller is powerful and healing unto itself.

Not being heard and especially not being heard with empathy and compassion are often what was missing in our growing-up environments, and this is what allowed for the initial wounding to happen. Consciously putting empathy and compassion back in our lives, noticing whether they are there and asking for them if they aren't is the basis for healing.

I emphasize that empathy and compassion need to be both in the listener and in the storyteller – the storyteller must listen to herself through empathy and compassion, and, perhaps, the experience of her listener's empathy and compassion will model this for the storyteller and allow her to access and augment it in herself.

To conclude-

It is a daunting task to write a lexicon as well as a glossary. Some of the material I excerpted from articles I have already written. I'm not sure whether this means I put the cart before the horse or the other way around. Perhaps you must first start using these words for their definitions to begin emerging in a clear enough way to really get the sense and meaning of it. It is a little like Focusing. As you use the words to describe the experience, the meanings start to come clear. At least, that is how it was for me. Of course, I can already see before I finish that the lexicon and glossary need to be enlarged. For another time.