

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

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Teaching Interactive Focusing In-the-Moment of the Experience

Interactive Focusing is intended to allow you to access your truth through the bodysense, and it gives you a way to share it by speaking and listening with empathy and with compassion. How do we teach such a mystery? By doing it out of our own experience and in the moment of that experiencing.

To begin-

The four building blocks form the foundation. The *first building block* is *creating a safe space*, for no process moves forward without this. In our workshops, we offer some suggestions for how this is done. For example, we indicate that you are in control of your own space and have the right and responsibility of letting your partner know if something is or isn't okay with you, even to the point of saying "no" or "stop." Another way is to sense inside in the moment and be sensitive to how deep you want to descend into your material.

Perhaps, in a workshop, the way in which I introduce safety is the way in which I introduce myself. Introductions, themselves, help welcome a safe climate. You know a little about the people with whom you will share your material. I suppose I make a silent appraisal of the group I'm in, and then I risk some honest and deep sharing about how I am in the moment in the group. I may share something I've discovered about myself as I dropped down inside and took time to check in during the initial attunement. I may comment on a nervousness and joy I sense into and say a little about that. I model trust and honest sharing and being in right relationship with myself. The participants' experiencing my trust of them often opens them to testing their own trust level through their own revelations when they introduce themselves. While I am honest and deep in my sharing, I am careful to not go to too deep a place initially. This could be scary for them...and me. This initial sharing can set the tone for the whole workshop.

The opening attunement becomes part of the building of the safe space. We are asking people to slow down and be fully present to themselves and others at the workshop in an attunement. This helps us clear a space and become more sensitive to what is happening inside of us.

The *second building block* is letting people have a direct experience of the *bodysense*. This is done through the *approach exercise*. Because this exercise is so full, much can be taught from it. Primarily we want people to build an experiential dictionary – a knowing of the *bodysense* from the inner experiencing of their own bodysense, not from some external description of it. It is through the sensitivity of bodysense that we sense into our story, and it is through the wisdom of the bodysense that we make sense of our story.

Here we introduce the notion of the approachee's needing to indicate if, when and where she wants the approacher to stop. Again, the idea of self-protection is marked. When the approacher stops in response to the approachee's signal, this is felt as empowering to the approachee. And it can be experienced as relieving to the approacher not to have to guess where the approachee wants her to stop. When we introduce the notion that the Focuser (approachee) has the right and responsibility to sense her own safety even to the point of saying "stop," during the opening period of the workshop, we see this healthy self-care thread itself throughout the workshop.

The *third building block* is *listening from the bodysense and selecting the listening response from the bodysense*. The listening response is a reflection of some experience-bearing part of the story the Focuser has revealed. This is illustrated by telling a short story to the participants with a primary experience-bearing part that the group is asked to become aware of through listening from their own bodysense. The workshop participants are asked to do nothing more than choose that sentence or two that indicates the experience which the Focuser has named and to reflect just that part back to her.

The *fourth building block* is the "*Focuser-as-teacher*." It is important to make this clear so a crisp demonstration of this is essential. Focuser-as-teacher rests in the assumption that only the Focuser knows, from her inside experience, what feels empathic and compassionate to her. The object of this exercise is to have the Focuser teach the listener how to listen to the Focuser in a way that feels empathic and compassionate to her. The way this is accomplished is for the Focuser to take the listener's reflective response in and resonate it against her bodysense as she experiences it in that new moment. She will be able to give the listener feedback, "Yes, you got it exactly," or "Could you say that part back a little slower?" or "I needed to hear the part where I said...", or "It was more frightened than scared" and so on.

The instructor who is demonstrating Focuser-as-teacher can actually comment on this to the participants who are observers, as she is doing it. She can indicate how she sensed what she needed perhaps by pointing to how "scared" didn't seem to fit her "in-the-moment bodysense" whereas "frightened" hit it exactly.

This kind of Focusing and listening is bodysense-to-bodysense communication.

The demonstrations -

This brings me to an essential discovery about teaching the Interactive Focusing process. Perhaps you will find, as we have, that the most important thing about teaching Interactive Focusing is the actual demonstrations of the process. Regardless of the size of the group, each person can feel *as if* you had one-on-one contact with them *if* they have been able to experience *you* during an actual demonstration.

Demonstrations are experiences shared by the whole group-

We have noticed the sharing of the experience by the whole group. Participants will comment on how the story from the demonstration touched their own stories. You can get a palpable feel of the intertwined energies. People feel directly spoken to when something touches them directly. This makes the quality and sincerity of the interactive demonstration crucial. Preparing them by asking them to observe the demonstration from their own bodysense is very important as you are inviting them to have an experience of the story, not to just observe it.

The demonstrations themselves – without and with interruption: A new discovery about teaching in-the-moment of the experiencing-

First present an uninterrupted demonstration-

It is important to first demonstrate the model in its entirety, even if there might be some confusion afterwards. Allowing the participants to get the whole *gestalt* of the model is important to their being able to ultimately absorb it. They first get a sense of the whole which lets them see how the parts fit in.

The participants don't actually seem to be confused during the *uninterrupted* demonstration. It may be helpful to prepare your observers by asking that they sit through this demonstration just sensing it from their own bodysense and asking them to take it all in, first. You can tell them that later you will do a second demonstration in which you will break the model down into parts, identify and explain them, and take any questions or address any confusion that may have arisen after this first *uninterrupted* demonstration.

The confusion often enters only after the demonstration when they are trying to sort things out for themselves. Then they have trouble identifying the parts, what they are actually supposed to do and so on. It is often a good thing to let the participants struggle with their confusion for a short while. This lets them know what they have *not* learned.

The discovery-

We have discovered something of enormous importance to clarifying the teaching of a process that can be as subtle as Interactive Focusing. Some years back, we realized that "coaching" needed to be done in the moment of

the experience, not at the end of the session. We devised a way of indicating a brief coaching "timeout" where the coach would come in during the session to tell the listener something she might find useful to do at that point in the session.

We have discovered that *experiential teaching*, teaching *from* and *during* the experience, becomes a very powerful tool in helping to teach as clearly and completely as possible. It is essential to *measure what you have taught by what your students have learned*. We have discovered that allowing questions from the participants during the teaching demonstration is not only possible but desirable. The questions indicate what part of your teaching has not yet been understood or digested. We find that it is helpful to identify parts of the model and comment on the process as it actually unfolds, during the session, not after it.

The experiential teaching demonstration of the Interactive Focusing session with interruption-

The teaching demonstration of an interaction between the workshop leaders begins. It needs to be an actual issue, not a role-play or something rehearsed. The Focuser and listener clearly label each part of the model as they come to it.

Labeling the parts of the model-

This will be done by saying something like, "We are going to take the double empathic moment now," and then giving a clear and concise description of the empathic moment and what each person will be doing. The Focuser might ask the listener, "Would you take a moment here to touch into your own bodysense to get empathically and with caring how it is for me to be carrying all of that which I just told you? And while you are doing that, I am going to go down inside of myself to get how that is for me now, with self-empathy and self-caring."

During the double empathic moment you might actually comment on the progress. For instance, the listener might comment on what is happening in her as she tries to empathically get how the story is experienced by the Focuser. She might say to the observers, "First there is a lot of chatter coming in my head. I am just going to move that over so I can get below that. I am dropping down to my bodysense now." Then she would say to the Focuser, "What comes is vague, but it is just below...no...around my belt, and it is tight...or more like squeezing. With that comes is an odd...almost funny sort of image...like a toothpaste tube being squeezed. I get a sense of that whole thing just coming out very freely, just like a glob of toothpaste

would shoot out of the squeezed tube after the cap has been removed. I'm not sure that fits where you are so could you check that?"

The Focuser would take that in and resonate it against what she was holding in her body in that new moment. She might comment to the observers, "I'm going to check the fit by resonating that against the bodysense of what is sitting in me right now...which is a little moved forward from where I started, and then I'll give the listener some feedback." If it fit she might say to the listener, "I'm just resonating that against what is there right now. I can feel a real fit because as I went down inside I realized that it felt so freeing to say all of that...and it is something that I have been holding in for a long time. And there is something funny about it too...clean, like I just brushed my teeth when I woke up...so that image really lets me know you didn't just hear me, you understand me." After resonating the listener's empathic response, the Focuser would share what came when she went down inside with self-empathy and self-compassion.

If the listener's empathic response didn't fit she might say, "When I resonate that, I realize that I'm not quite there, yet. I mean, I said all of that, but it still feels like just before the cap comes off. It is still tight in there...but I feel a pressure and a wanting to remove what blocks it. It helped me when you said that even though it didn't quite fit. It let me see where I really am. What came for me when I went down to be empathic and compassionate with myself is more like...."

When the listener's empathic response doesn't exactly fit, the listener might say to the observers, "When the Focuser gave me that feedback it was really helpful in getting it just the way she had it. I felt more empathically connected to her, like I could shift to where she was."

Sometimes the listener's empathic response will move the Focuser ahead in her process. Sometimes there is a joining of the listener's empathic response and the Focuser's empathic response, and it is amalgamated inside of the Focuser leading to another shift.

Revealing what is happening beyond the parts of the model-

We do this identifying and commenting with each part of the model. Throughout the demonstration we label not just the parts of the model, but we comment on all aspects we are trying to teach...on how the bodysense is forming, for instance, and what words are coming to describe it. This is important to reveal as so much goes on inside the Focuser and listener that would otherwise be silent and isn't apparent to observers.

The listener may note for the observers, "Some of my own material is coming in here right now. I'm going to take a moment to clear it out so I can

take in the Focuser's story," or "I feel that I missed part of what the Focuser just said so I am going to tell her that and to ask her to repeat part of it for me."

The Focuser might say, "The listener just said back what I told her, but it doesn't feel like she really heard me. I'm going to ask her to slow down and put a little more energy in it, just the way I said it," or "She didn't seem to get how much I *wanted* to let tears come there, but they just wouldn't flow. I'm going to tell her that again."

The luxury of letting the observer ask questions during the process itself-

In addition to the Focuser and listener actually narrating what is happening inside of them during the process and identifying the parts of the model, it is very helpful to let the observers ask questions during the session itself. Someone may be confused about where the Focuser's or the listener's words come from. They might ask the demonstrators about the how the bodysense of it was, giving them a chance to really describe the bodysense of "it" from which the words came.

Another participant might be confused about whether you are talking from your head or your bodysense. It gives the demonstrators a chance to check on that and to answer the participant's question.

You have indicated that now you are giving the interactive response, but your observer is confused about *why* this is the interactive response. You can clearly but concisely explain how the interactive response comes in your bodysense *in response to* what the first Focuser said. It is now your turn to Focus and what is coming from you is something that was directly touched by something the first Focuser revealed. You can explain that it is very similar to step one, telling the story, but it is responding to something from step one.

Interrupting the process doesn't interrupt the processing-

When the demonstrators actually interrupt the process to teach and answer questions, it, surprisingly, doesn't throw the process off. Perhaps, inside of us, we know that we are in a teaching situation, and that inside place honors that this may be needed for teaching. We have found that the Focuser and listener can interrupt the process to teach from it, *and* they can successfully continue with the processing, *if* they are well-grounded in the model. We have found that the observers can follow the process without losing the flow of the model, even though it may have been interrupted many times with the variety of teachings.

*A flow chart for part of the teaching of the Interactive Focusing model...first demonstrated **without** interruption and then **with** interruption-*

An ideal flow chart for teaching Interactive Focusing in a workshop of at least two days duration would be:

Day One:

1. Present the *four building blocks*.
2. After the four building blocks, have the participants practice the *compassionate, empathic listening (building block three) and Focuser-as-teacher (building block four)*. They can do this in dyads or in a round-robin format depending on the number of participants.
3. Instructors do an *uninterrupted demonstration of the Interactive Focusing process*. First they clearly explain all of the parts of the model taking special care with part one (Focuser telling the story), part two (listener giving reflective responses) and part three (the double empathic moment shared by the Focuser and listener).
4. After the uninterrupted demonstration the participants will then practice in a round-robin format. Have the participants do the *round-robin format of the first three parts, only, of the Interactive Focusing model*: 1) Focuser One tells her *story*. 2) Listener One listens from the bodysense and gives *reflective responses*, only. The Focuser is Focuser-as-teacher giving the listener whatever feedback is needed. 3) Focuser One and Listener One take the *double empathic moment*. After these three parts are completed the round-robin moves on to the next set of participants. Listener One becomes Focuser Two; a new person becomes Listener Two. Focuser Two and Listener Two take the double empathic moment, and so on. Only the first three parts of the model are done at this point. The interactive response and the interactive closing aren't performed. This enlarges #2 of the flow chart above where the participants practice the listening from the bodysense and Focuser-as-teacher, this time adding only the double empathic moment.
5. This would be as far as you get on day one, allowing this to percolate overnight.

Day Two:

6. Questions and confusions might arise in the participants. This allows the instructors to do the *experiential teaching demonstration of the Interactive Focusing session with interruptions* the next day. It is during this session that you can answer any questions that have formed in the participants during the first *uninterrupted demonstration* itself and afterwards when they practiced the first

three parts of the model for themselves. The questions and confusions indicate what they have not yet learned. It gives you a second chance to teach this, and it gives you a second chance to be successful in helping your students learn what you hope to teach.

In conclusion-

Confusion *during* a workshop can be a good thing. Confusion *at the end* of the workshop can be a bad thing. When the material we are presenting is new, it takes the student a while to struggle with the learning of this something-that-is-not-yet-known. If the student is willing to engage in learning this something new, it is almost certain that confusion and questions will come in the student.

After presenting the four building blocks as a foundation on which to build, I suggest that the way to teach is to brave the confusion and present the whole model first. Let the student experience the *gestalt* of it. Only after this, break the model down and invite questions...but do this teaching in the moment of the demonstration itself. Let the questioning and confusion be bodily felt in the student, and let the commentary and explanation come from and during the experience of the demonstrators. Letting the process become more transparent and risking becoming more transparent as the demonstrator allows the process to become more apparent.

While Interactive Focusing appears to be a very natural process, it may still be hidden from the view of the student. Revealing it is a process of the teacher's finding a way to present it in a digestible form and the student's wanting to take it in. In this interplay, the measure of how successful the teacher has been is how much the student has learned. How successful the student will be often hinges on the desire to know and the ability to tolerate the confusion that enters about things not yet known. From the confusion will come the question, and from the question will come the answer.