

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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Experiential Learning

As a teacher, by my students I've been taught-

I was teaching a two-day workshop, the second of four two-day workshops designed to advance people to the level of certification to teach others Interactive Focusing. The participants knew Focusing and the Interactive Focusing model. They were learning a new part – how to coach others using Interactive Focusing.

Enter confusion-

During the first day, I became aware of a confusion arising and then spreading through the workshop. I went immediately to a vulnerable place in myself about my material being unclear, my presentation being disorganized and the material itself being unworthy. These were all valid considerations. A teacher should review these when confusion enters. What I did seem to sense was that there wasn't chaos, though there was significant confusion. There wasn't disorganization though there was some looseness in the management of the material, time and timing. And I do believe in the material I am presenting; it is most worthwhile, in my opinion.

Experiential Learning-

Before I proceed, there is a need to define experiential learning, because 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 and working on them in a Focusing way.

Beware ungrounded intellect and affect-

When we try to bring clarity to our learning it is imperative that this not be intellectualized, rather that we honor the bodysense and its ability to reveal what is hidden, what we do not yet know, what is unclear, what is out of focus. Intellectualizing a bodysense-based, experiential learning can do an injustice and harm to this kind of process of clarifying or bringing into focus. It is equally important that we do not allow pure affect to overtake the process as emotion can easily be confused with the bodysense or *direct referent* as Gendlin named it.

Confusion can be a good thing-

So what did *I* learn at my last workshop? I learned that confusion can be a good thing. I learned there is a difference between unclear, chaotic, disorganized and confused. I learned there is a difference between unhealthy and *healthy confusion*. I learned that confusion can be the signpost to readiness. Confusion that comes from inner questioning may point to the readiness to take in something new and make it your own. The confusion that stands on the edge of new growth can be a very a healthy confusion, indeed.

It is the bodysense of *uncomfortable* that can point us in the direction of what we need to have revealed, and *confusion* may be one of those uncomfortable states that is a most reliable pointer to our discovering our deep truths.

Question certainty -

I learned that a lack of confusion may be a bad thing. A lack of confusion may indicate someone is taking in the material on faith as dogma rather than struggling with it. A lack of confusion may mean that the material is already known or that it is too simple or that it is lacking in the seriousness needed to be something one desires to really learn. By “really learn” I mean to do battle with, to struggle to make it your own, to take in the learning and to process and metabolize it...and, then, maybe to fall in love with it.

Clinging to certainty may be a developmental arrest – not being able to stay in the uncertain to make room for the “new” to enter. There is actually a phobia, neophobia, which puts people in a disabling panic when confronted with the new, the uncertain.

The relationship between certainty, uncertainty and confusion-

While we may find comfort in certainty, it is in uncertainty that we find the path to new learnings. For instance, about death, the certainty is that, ultimately, we all will die. The uncertainty is that we don't know when. We don't know how. We don't know by what means. We don't know the circumstances; will it be surrounded by family, friends or alone, an accident, an illness, short or prolonged, painful or peaceful, and so on. Perhaps, most importantly, we don't know in certainty, whether we will die well or poorly. Will this be our final stage of growth or will we be diminished by our last act? In this uncertainty lies the mystery.

I believe that I would choose the mystery of uncertainty and the amount of confusion that might bring...to the questionable comfort of certainty. Not knowing how I will confront death gives me room to learn something, to develop, and there is an aliveness in that. Knowing that I

certainly will die leaves me with neither comfort nor curiosity. In that certainty, there is no growth. It seems pre-determined. It seems dead.

Discerning between certainty and uncertainty:

I invite you to do a discernment exercise. Allow yourself to relax. Open some room in your center to receive. First take down inside the word *certainty*. What is the bodysense that forms around certainty? Let the images, sensations and story come around that. Again, clear some space, almost like cleansing the palate by taking sorbet between courses. This time take the word *uncertainty* down inside. See what comes here. What is the bodysense this time?

Healthy and unhealthy confusion-

How to tell the difference between unhealthy and healthy confusion: Wait until the next day! When students have had the chance to take in the teachings, how do they come out the other side? Are they still confused or have they processed the material and digested it – do they have it in their bones? Can they make sense of it for themselves? Could they teach it to someone else? Does it now have their imprimatur on it?

Healthy confusion can come in that moment when we are finally grasping *it*, making some meaning of it for ourselves. Just before we catch the pass, we may bobble the ball for a moment – and then we have it firmly held in both hands. That is what I saw happen in my last workshop. I saw people go from thinking *What is this?* or *I couldn't possibly do that*, or *There is just too much here to learn... to...I can do that!* And what's more, *they did do that...and they did it their way*. I didn't notice any cookie-cutter presentations. They stuck firmly to the model...with their own unique way of doing it. I saw a lot of healthy personalities stand up and say their piece. Without the confusion, I think there could have been rote memorization and repetition or hopelessly murky stuckness.

What does confusion mean in the learning process?

When we take in something new, a series of things must happen in order for us to be assured that this is a learning we have use for and value...and that this is a learning we can tolerate. I will touch on a couple of these things.

We search for *similar* knowings and match the new against the old. Is it close enough to something we already know to allow us to make the next step to the new? If it doesn't have a relationship we can recognize as similar, does the new learning somehow fit into our own conceptualization of *reasonable*? Is it reasonable to think that this new learning could be *consistent* with our conceptualization of what is *possible*? If it is further from our previous understanding of the *similar* or *reasonably consistent*

possibility, we will have to do some more energetic processing...and we may need to stretch to take a bold new step.

It is in this kind of struggle to understand that confusion enters. We don't know this new path. Are we willing to move forward without familiar compass points or a well worn footpath? It is at this juncture that we don't know whether to push forward or to retreat. Going back to the familiar is comfortable...but may be against human nature and our inherent curiosity, our need to make sense of, our need to attribute meaning, our need to know. Even in retreating, sometimes the terrain has changed, and finding our way back is difficult or no longer possible. Going forward means going into the unknown, the new...and this can feel uncomfortable.

The value of the uncomfortable-

Of course, my contention is that the uncomfortable is our compass point, our divining rod. The uncomfortable points to the direction we may need to tread. I believe this is true for both the content and the process. The *process* is simply a level above the *content*, and the process is infinitely more powerful than the content. When we are asked not just to investigate new content...to discover new truths about ourselves and our lives...but to take on a whole new process or way of coming to our truths, this can be more intimidating. And I think this puts a stress on the human being that intensifies the conditions around learning...one of which is the confusion inherent in learning, itself.

Preparedness and Readiness-

Preparedness and readiness are also pieces of teaching. In other words, trying to teach someone something new before they are either prepared from previous training or ready in their own personal development simply doesn't work. Confusion can arise both from lack of preparation and from lack of readiness to learn.

I distinguish between *preparedness* and *readiness*. Preparedness has to do with the clarity of the model, the quality of the presentation, the attentiveness of the student. The lack of preparedness resulting from previous inadequate training can come from the teacher – lack of clear material organized in a way that builds to the current place. Have the building blocks been put in place so the structure will stand solidly even under stress? Unpreparedness can come from the student's not grappling with the material in a serious and energetic way or inattention or disinterest and the like. Again, a teacher must examine and discern about the question of preparedness, as must the student. There is no shame in lack of readiness as that is developmental – however, there is a disappointment in unpreparedness

on either side of the teaching/learning equation. I ask myself, "Did I prepare my students well enough?" and I ask my students to ask themselves, "Did I prepare myself well enough?"

At the global level, readiness is about, perhaps, unleashing the model at *this time into the world*. Have we developed world consciousness to the point that this can be absorbed? Is this too far ahead of world consciousness? Conversely, is the model too far behind us? Is it already known and therefore loses our interest because it is boring.

Do we have another model already available to us that covers this, that works as well, that we have practiced and know...so it makes it hard to want to take on something new but redundant.

Though the model seems deceptively simple, it is extraordinarily powerful leaving us mindful that if we are going to use this model, we must check on our readiness to discover what may come...and we must be brave enough to use it with authenticity, genuineness and sincerity.

Personal or psychological readiness is another consideration. Have we developed enough as human beings to be ready and willing to grapple with this kind of soul searching? Are we ready for the new discoveries this model brings forward or are we frightened by what we might find? Are we personally ready to go to the places suggested by the power of the model? Is it too frightening or sad or forbidden or difficult or complex...? Are we ready, piece by piece, to take in all of the model? Some of the model? Any of the model? We need to check at each point to re-establish this.

Are we ready for the development that using this model implies and which has been borne out from the reports of those who are using it? Just a new pieces of the model keep emerging as it is used, so does your own development keep coming forward.

Be forewarned: This is a very challenging model to use when there is something deep between the people in the dyad. You must be willing to keep touching the bodysense at all times which will lead you to a deep and genuine process. You must be willing to stand in your truth and listen to your partner say hers...which needs its own right time to reveal itself. Primarily you must be willing to bring empathy and compassion to whatever comes...from inside of yourself and from what is shared from inside of your partner.

Strategies-

These considerations are subtle things, so how do we really know them when we see them? *Using the bodysense*, on which this whole model is predicated, is our first strategy for detection. Being aware that there are some things in the way of our learning that may need attention – like sensing the confusion

and processing what that is all about. Checking in periodically to see where we are in our development, our readiness and our preparation – both personal and academic, is a needed strategy.

Discerning (getting it at a very fine distinction, is it this or is it that) is an important strategy in moving things forward...becoming aware precedes changing. We can discern between our personality styles and attitudes as well as between words and phrases. We can discern to let come clear whether our confusion feels like *I don't have it yet* or *I'll never get it*. We can check to see if our personal style is *It's a challenge, and I'm ready to struggle* or *It's hopeless, and I feel helpless*. Does adversity bring renewed effort, or does it bring a sense of defeat and depression? Is your response a personal style or is it about the material and model?

Discerning whether we are learning new content or a new process model helps us know something about the intensity of the confusion. We probably will experience more confusion around learning the model than learning the content. The intensity of confusion may let us know that we are doing battle with a process and help us look in appropriate places to assist us with our learnings. We can ask what similar processes do I know? Does this process really address something I need in my own life? Or it may just tell us that this intensified confusion is something we will have to go through in order to make this process our own, and, in this way, help reassure and calm ourselves in going through the confusion. It can, similarly, tell us that we may need to invest more energy in learning the process...and this knowing can ready us for this energy expense.

Knowing that human beings are capacious...that we have the ability to stretch in so many areas of our lives is a truth and a comfort. The speed at which we stretch may mean the difference between safely increasing our capacity and tearing a ligament, so stretching at the right speed bears keeping in mind. There is a too fast and a too slow and a just right.

A caveat to future teachers-

I can remember an experience at a workshop some time ago. I was presenting my material with some other instructors. The material had been written out in a clear fashion, but the demonstration to illustrate the model was somewhat fuzzy. My experience of the participants' response was that they were uncomfortable sitting with the confusion. They were wanting the instructors to clear up the confusion immediately. They expressed an edge of disappointment or anger with myself and the other presenters.

Though I am indicating that there was some honest fuzziness in that particular presentation, I have seen this happen where material new to the

participants was presented in a very clear fashion. It is hard to sit even with our healthy confusion. It is easier to blame someone else than to take responsibility and try to work through the confusion to a place of understanding and competence. As a teacher, I forewarn myself not to get trapped by participants' impatience, immediate disappointment, frustration, anger and wanting me to fix it. I try to remember to give participants time to demonstrate their own competence before I intervene. I try to remain sensitive to this apparent negativity to see where I need to go and where I need to not go with my teaching.

In conclusion-

The things that have interested me in this paper are: The differences between kinds of unclarity (chaos, disorganization, confusion); the difference between unhealthy and healthy confusion; what is confusion as regards the learning process; certainty vs. uncertainty; the difference between preparedness and readiness in teaching and learning; strategies for dealing with readiness and confusion; the differences between learning the content and the process model; the teacher as an object of dissatisfaction for disgruntled students; and why any and all of this is important for teachers and students to know.

This isn't meant to be a comprehensive review of confusion and readiness in the learning process. There are many more influences and considerations, but these are the considerations I can explore from my personal experience to date.

I have tried to imagine the teaching process forward for both the teacher and the student, and I have realized how interchangeable these two roles are. It is prosaic to say that *from your students you will be taught*, and it is true. This leaves me wanting to know more about both roles, to be aware of myself in this relationship regardless of my role and from both sides concurrently. I sense that one way to talk about the relationship is that ***to be the student is to be in the process of becoming the teacher, and to be the teacher is to be the student's student.*** Fortuitously, we have a model called Interactive Focusing that may help this teacher/student relationship come into clarity.