

Letting felt meaning function richly in conversation: two reflective practice experiments

Background

Gendlin's Focusing practice offers a very attenuated form of conversation: the listener tracks the Focuser's process closely; the listener's own process rests very much in the background: one does not bring one's own thoughts and interests directly into the conversation - one lets the Focuser's felt sense lead, direct, the process.

Research questions, interests

What would conversation become if we let Focusing sensitivities to our own and each other's experience of felt meaning play a central role in shaping what conversation is, and we pursue profound mutuality?

Methods

We are experimenting with variations to the ways we talk and listen together, seeking ways of shaping *what conversation is*, so that it is richly, intensely felt sense based.

Three ways of starting:

1. Starting by Focusing together, and letting what Focusing is morph in the direction of greater mutuality - *Experiment 1: Focusing dialogue.*
2. Start by beginning the conversation, and explore ways to morph the way you are talking to let conversation support each of you heeding your felt understanding more richly - *Experiment 2: Spacious Conversation.*
3. Play with moving slowly back and forth between Focusing together and conversing more naturalistically ... Explore what happens as you shift ... look for ways to make the transitions less abrupt, more fluid, with more fine-grained variation in kinds of process in play ...

Some micropractice options:

- Check with your felt sense before you speak, each time the occasion for you to speak arises ...
- As you hear the other person, let their words come into Focusing space, savour them, feel how they fit and don't fit your sense of things, experiment with how they could be made to fit: what would they mean then?
- Play with listening to yourself - with hearing yourself as you speak; for instance:
 - What is your tone of voice?
 - How are you pacing yourself? Are you rushing?, is your pace slow?, steady?, ...
 - Where would you place yourself, in each short passage of conversation, on Gendlin's Experiencing Scale?
- Track your own awareness of the other person's presence ... play with ways of letting your awareness of the other person's openness, their felt-sensing-ness, their ability or potential to listen deeply to themselves underpin your conversing ...
- Feel free to develop your own experiments, pursuing anything that is promising or you are curious about ... Experiment in a spirit of gentleness, kindness and generosity ...
- Exploratory practice, move testing, and hypothesis testing (Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*):
 - Exploratory practice: Do whatever seems helpful or appropriate at the time.
 - Move testing: try something you think might be helpful or interesting.
 - Hypothesis testing: try something to see if it has the results you expect.
- Let your own felt sense of what it might be interesting to explore guide you ...



Experiment 1: Focusing dialogue - letting Focusing expand in the direction of conversation

Begin Focusing together ... i.e. you are *both* Focusing ... feeling Space, clearing a space, whatever is helpful ...

Each let a felt sense form of where you are now with our topic, 'Focusing, Vastness and Union' ...

Both speak from your felt sense,

- heeding 'leadings' to share (a sense that speaking this-here is helpful, appropriate)
- find something that it feels appropriate to start with
- ... otherwise rest silently

Both heeding, being aware of, taking in, what the other person says

... whatever is said is "taken in", felt sensingly held

... nothing is responded to in a purely "logical" way, i.e. not 'replying logically or analytically' ...

... speaking only from your felt sense ... , when you feel moved to do so ... anticipate lots of silence ...

As you are concluding, let a sense of what is closure for you come, ... and allow what is open to be open ...; if you feel moved to, let a sense come of how you might like to experiment with these practices, going forward ...

Experiment 2 - Spacious Conversation - letting conversation deepen in the direction of Focusing microprocesses

Begin a conversation around where you each are now with our topic, 'Focusing, Vastness and Union' ...

As you are conversing,

allow the other person's presence to come gently to you ... taking in their words, not rushing ...

allow a generous space to arise in which your companion and you are held, ...
a space in which they experience plenty of room to be present, ...

a space in which you experience
plenty of space between
your sense of their presence working in you, and
your sense of *your own* process implying ... how *you* are implying being carried forward ...

let their words be present ... allow their texture, tone, taste, flavour to come in ... without feeling pressed to act ...

allow your own words to rise easily, sensuously, gently, ... let them take their time coming to you, let speech come slowly if it wishes ... Feel your own rhythms ... letting your companion be themselves, speak, act, yourself in ways and at a pace that feel easy and comfortable for you ...

If you as you're conversing, you notice you are feeling you need to rush, push, struggle, strain ...
If you feel you are being rushed ...

- ... let a hint of very gently relaxing, breathing restfully, softening, loosening, ... come ...
- ... allow any sense of pressing or straining to surface ... allow any tightening to come, form, jell, ... gently making space for it ...

... Be generous with any sense of rushing, your own or your companions; gently, kindly, spaciouly, slowly, with caring-feeling-presence, be with the rushing ... with curiosity, kindness ...

