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Thinking at the Edge – TAE

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1 Introduction:

Thinking at the Edge is a philosophical practice. It is the second philosophical practice that comes out of Eugene T. Gendlin's Philosophy of Entry into the Implicit. The first one is of course Focusing which most of us are already familiar with. Although Dr. Gendlin taught general outline of this practice to his Philosophy students at the University of Chicago for many years, it was first presented under the name of "Thinking at the Edge" at a workshop in 1998. Since then there were 5 workshops in English and 3 in German language.

Dr. Gendlin is a Philosopher. Both practices Focusing and TAE are imbedded into his Philosophy. I will touch on some of his thought, but since we have only 3 hours for this workshop and I planned to balance my presentation with experiential work, I will be able to reflect only briefly onto it. For more background on his philosophical works and writings, especially A Process Model, please see www.focusing.org

I would like to touch on those issues which will help me to explain TAE.

The first one is about different models.

2 Models

There are many Models through which we can view our existence in the Universe, how we relate to each other, to our environment and to everything else that there is.

Scientific Model

We are all most familiar with the Scientific Model. Scientific Model operates on the basis of worked out rules, concepts, and strategies. These are exact, precise, predictable, concrete and reliable. We can not even imagine the disarray we would be in without such a Model. More often than not we don't actually think much if there might be another way to experience

our lives. The advantage of this Model is that it is reliable, repeatable, and necessary and therefore appears safe. The disadvantage is ... a live human being has to fit him/herself into these featureless concepts, or have to apply them to oneself. That what is the most alive in us doesn't fit into closed concepts and it has to stay out and not be considered. What is lacking in the model that is based on worked out concepts is that the live human being with intricacies that change, grow, spread, bring new life and richness are left out. There can be new links that have never been said or thought of before, that have a potential to be brought to life, but have no space to go in the Scientific Model.

3 Implicit Entry

Each and everyone among us registers daily such possibilities in ourselves, but most of us don't know how to process them, or don't think that they would mean anything to anyone else, or that we don't know how to enrich human lives with it. Gendlin's Model of Implicit has a different entry point. This Model is rich in intricacy and possibilities.

We live in a situation. We are interactional creatures – we are already in interaction with other human beings, nature, and environment in general – with universe around us. The felt sense is the touchstone – central point - to experience this. Here are a few examples I'd like to use to help you understand this position.

One of Gene's points from his Process Model is about lungs and air and breathing being one functioning system. So lungs are also air and lungs are also breathing, because one doesn't function without the other! Take the lungs away the breathing doesn't happen. Take the breathing away, lungs collapse.

Another one that speaks to me is - observing a tree or a plant for instance. In Scientific approach you can learn everything about that tree, the kind, the size, where it grows, what is good and bad for it and so on. In Gene's Model, for me, is understanding that the tree doesn't need to know that, but knows how to function in its environment – it knows from inside what nutrients it needs, how much water ... and so on. It doesn't need all nutrients or water, it just needs that what will make this tree a tree.

One of my favorites, that really made me understand this, was an interview with an Australian Aboriginal Lady. She told me a story about herself as a child when they were separated from their land and put into Reservations. She said that her mother would take all the kids from the family from time to time back to the "land that we belong to". As she mentioned this "land we belong to" several times I asked her to explain what she means by it. She described some of their walkabouts. The mother would take them to the land they belong to - to "listen" – but the listening was not with ears, but they observed, absorbed, moved around, noticed, "read" things, sounds, smells ... around them – this is how they need to be to understand themselves. They are part of that "land they belong to". They experienced themselves in the living situation.

4 Thinking

We generally talk about Thinking as a process of collecting facts, learning concepts, knowing something already thought through by somebody else – the existing concepts. Thinking at the Edge is different. It is an interplay of what you felt sensingly know and don't know yet, and finding a way to articulate it. This is where TAE starts.

5 Tapping in

So there is some kind of "knowing" that is implicit in situation. This kind of knowing is not a scientific knowing, but experiential, rich tapestry that each one of us has and at the same time don't have yet. One is at the Edge! We tap into it – through our own organism and it is different for each person. Again the FELT SENSE is the touchstone.

When we focus we tap into implicit knowing. When we do TAE we tap into it as well.

6 Difference between Focusing and TAE

What strikes me as the biggest difference between these two Philosophical Practices that are dependent on the Felt Sense as direct referent, is their starting points and the intended destination of the process.

Although Focusing is not only about the personal healing process, it has gained its recognition as such. We tend to look for a sign of fuzziness or discomfort, so to enter into that what needs to carry forward in our personal experience of life.

In TAE we enter into a generative process. We tap into something we know about. "Know about" – this again is a process in itself. We know about something that seems to be significant, that you didn't hear from somebody else, or read somewhere - YOU know something about THAT, because you experienced it and it made a mark, it called for your attention, but you don't have words to say it yet. That knowing is implicit, not yet articulated or organised, but has a value.

7 Language

So we come to language and articulation of this knowing. We start to use the words that come to us, but they can not express the meaning of what we implicitly know. Most of the words we use in everyday life, have already some meaning attached to them. Gendlin calls these "public" words. In TAE we learn how to break the language barrier that can not express our meaning.

(Show VIDEO CLIP 1 from TAE in 14 Steps # 1 Start at 5:20 -17:00 (Gendlin Introducing TAE))

8 TAE Steps

TAE process, like the Focusing Process can be learned through process steps. In TAE there are 14 steps. But to simplify this at the beginning I would rather talk about 3 Phases.

○ First Phase

Steps 1-5 is about the Interaction between the Felt Sense and Articulation of it.

○ Second Phase

Steps 6-8 is about working with Facets,

○ Third Phase

Steps 9-14 is about building a Theory from the work you have done in previous steps.

Everybody doesn't have to go through all the steps. You can stop at any time.

But if you work your thought through into a credible theory, you can put it into the world and enrich it with something that has never been said before, didn't even exist, and it comes from the First Person – You. Because you start from something YOU know about. It has a great value, because that is what the world is deprived from, a real human experience that has fresh meaning and potential.

Today, we will concentrate on the first phase.

8.1 Handout: Steps 1-5

T A E S T E P S: The First five Steps

Steps 1- 5

Words from the felt sense

1 Let a felt sense form

Choose something you “know” and cannot yet say that wants to be said. **Have this knowing as a distinct bodily-felt unclear edge to which you can always return**

It needs to be in a field in which you are knowledgeable and experienced. Do not start with a question, but with something that you “know.” If having a felt sense is unfamiliar to you, please consult www.focusing.org.

Write it down in a few paragraphs in a very rough way.

What in this do you “know” and wish to articulate? Within this, what is the live point for you in it?

Write the central crux in one sentence, even though the sentence doesn't really say it.

Underline one key word or phrase in the sentence.

Write down one instance.

You need a specific example, an event or a time when it actually happened which exemplifies your felt sense of knowing.

2 Non-logical

Find what does not make the usual logical sense.

What is new can seem quite illogical. This may be the most valuable part. Please assure yourself that you are not dropping this out.

You can write a paradox.

To help you to hold on to what seems illogical, you can write a paradoxical sentence: Something is “x” and also not “x”. If nothing fits this format you can skip this step.

3 No words fit

Take out the underlined word from your sentence in Step 1. Write the usual (dictionary) definition of the word and notice that it is not what you meant.

You recognize, “that's not what I meant”. Building theory is partly to communicate. Therefore we consider the public meanings of the words. If you are saying something new, none of the words in their usual meanings will say it exactly. Make sure it is not just a synonym, but a word with a

Return to your felt sense and let another word come to say what you mean.

somewhat different meaning

Write the usual definition of the second word.

When you consider its public meaning, you see that the second word does not fit either.

Return to your felt sense and let a third word come.

Again its public meaning is not what you meant.

Write the usual definition of the third word.

No word fits. None should, if this is new.

Accept the fact that there is no established word or phrase for this knowing.

4 All the words fit

Now let the first word speak from your felt sense after all. Let yourself feel what you wanted the word to mean in your sentence.

Insist that your sentence does speak from your felt sense. The sentence can make the word change. This time, do not give up your sense. Do not let the word say what it usually says. **Wait until you feel this whole sentence speaking from your felt sense, in a way**, even though most people might not understand it so.

Write a sentence that articulates exactly what the first word pulls out from your felt sense (which the other two do not).

You will need a new phrase to say what you want the word to mean in your sentence.

Do this with the second word.

Do this with the third word.

Put all three words and all three new phrases into the underlined spot in your sentence from Step 1. You now have a "string." At the end your string add "...".

Play with the grammar and order, and eliminate excess words until you have a sentence you like. Now you have a sentence with more elaboration to say what you are tracking.

5 Expanding what you mean

For each of the three words or phrases write a somewhat odd sentence or two in order to expand what you mean.

Check whether you used any major public words. If so make fresh phrases to replace those. Let your felt sense express itself into fresh language. Your sentences might make no sense unless they are understood as you mean them. Here are examples of linguistically unusual sentences:

“Knowing the rules is a container from which new ways open”. “Definitions stop cellular growth”. “Behavior shows something it has”. If you let your felt sense speak directly, something linguistically unusual can come.

In each of the sentences, underline the new details.

Time for Questions and comments.

Experiential Work 1:

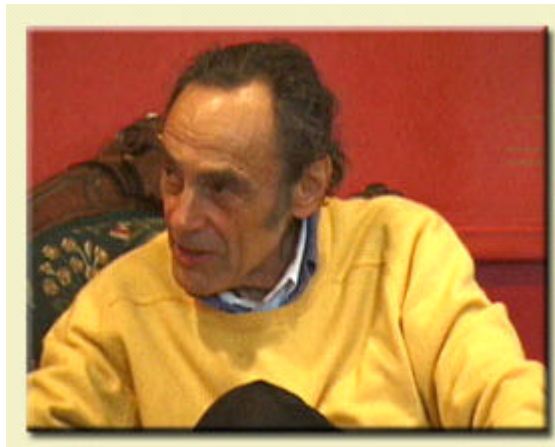
I'd like you to take a moment to think about something that you would like to work with today. It should be something that you know about, possibly in some area that you are working in, are interested in, familiar with to some extent - something that makes you excited, curious, attracted to in some way.

2 minutes

Write down what came to you. It should be something you experienced and have an instance of. Write down that instance as well.

(We will look at another short clip 2 from Video # 1 of TAE in 14 Steps (Start 26:50 – 35:23))

“You need to stand again in your own experiencing - in your own felt ongoingness, which is that intricate complexity inside of life - to put into the world what hasn't been said yet that you are carrying from your particular experiencing” Gene Gendlin from “TAE in 14 Steps” video #1



9 TAE Partnership

TAE Partnership is somewhat different from the Focusing Partnership. First the Partner writes down – everything the person in the process says. It can be in a point form or in full sentence, depending on the phase of the process. Besides that TAE Partnership is a bit more collaborative work, but - about the topic that person is working on and with the respect for his/her inner process. But the partner is the one who can write down what the person is thinking about, and can bring those fine intricate details back to his/her attention as the work progresses and evolves.

A short Clip 3 about the Partnership will give you some more ideas about the particulars of this collaboration.

(Video # 1 of TAE in 14 Steps (Start 55:36 – 58:14))

Questions Comments

Experiential Work 2:

Find a Partner with whom you will work for the next half an hour. We will work on Step # 1. Please attempt to write down your first sentence as well as you can. I also want to remind you that this sentence, although in preliminary stage, needs to resonate with your felt sense. THE FELT SENSE has to like your sentence!

When we return to the group you can share what you discovered.

That was all we were able to do in this 3 hour presentation.

P.S.

10 [A report on the Presentation after the Conference](#)

TAE at the 15th IFC in Germany

I just returned from The 15th International Focusing Conference in Germany and I want to say a few words about my presentation of TAE

The title of my workshop was “Introduction to TAE”. The reason I am writing about it is to say how thrilled I am about the effect it made on the participants. Initially I had one 3 hour presentation, which included some experiential components. There were about 16 people who came to the workshop. They listened to the explanations, watched few selected clips from “TAE in 14 steps” video and then went into partnership to discover for themselves how TAE works. After coming back from their partnerships, the excitement in the room was practically palpable. This is hard to describe, but the glow in the eyes and vivacity of exchanges was unmistakable. It is about creative, generative process that this practice taps into and they found it!

The next day, one of the Conference participants who missed my workshop came to say how sorry she was not to attend it, and would I consider repeating it the next day. Well, I was honored by her invitation, but not terribly keen to get all the preparation and butterflies activated again. However, I said if there are enough people who would attend I’ll do it. She posted it and they came – we had to change the room because over 50 people showed up. These were all new people who heard from others about TAE and were happy to have another opportunity to do it. The result of it was like I described above, just multiplied by 50 from the earlier one.

My Strategy

My intention was not to go any further than first five steps, but I was pretty sure we would not be able to go much further than Step 1. We managed to work on Step 1 and get the idea about the public words and paradox. I know that people get overwhelmed by the IDEA of 14 STEPS, so I took Gene’s idea that TAE could be divided into 3 phases.. That was one of the simplifications I incorporated. I also tend to make differentiation (like in Focusing) between doing the process and understanding the theory of the driving potential that makes this philosophical practice possible.

What did I ask the participants to do? There were several people in the big group who would ask question what they should work on. I would ask them what are they interested in or what is their occupation or what is dear to them, but they can not say yet properly. So one or two gave me some clues. For instance, one young man said that his hobby is music. So I said to him "You know something about that - what it means to you, maybe where you want to take it, maybe how you experience yourself when you play that instrument. You know something that you didn't hear from somebody else, or read somewhere - YOU know something about THAT". That is what he worked on going back and forth between writing sentences and fittingness of the felt sense. He had a huge shift, recognizing in himself a special gift that he can carry forward in a very different way than before. A young Japanese man - who had an interpreter with him, because he doesn't speak English, ended up writing a Haiku!!!

So what is it that makes this process so attractive and powerful? I don't know, but my sense is that it is touching into and crossing with a much deeper intricate order. I realize that it is not what I did as much as what they found when they entered into their own implicit existence.

11 Video Tapes – DVD

There are 2 Sets of Video Tapes on TAE

The set of 5 tapes, simply called "Thinking at the Edge" was videotaped and produced after the very first workshop on TAE in 1998. There are 5 tapes in that series. I kept most of the material that was presented and discussed in that workshop. There is a great richness in these tapes - of formation of TAE, Gene's philosophy, some focusing reflections and movements and a lot more. At that time TAE was presented in 9 steps.

Since then, TAE went through development that came out of experiencing, experimenting, clarifying the steps, working with groups and individuals - and through that evolvement is now presented in 14 steps. I videotaped each yearly workshop so far, but I produced only the first one (5 tapes), and the workshop of 2001 (2 tapes). This latest one is called "TAE in 14 Steps". Below is a bit more detailed description of TAE in 14 steps:

The second Set, Produced in 2001 consists of 2 tapes and is also available in DVD format. These two tapes have been carefully directed and edited to illustrate each of the fourteen steps, in order. One example is followed through all fourteen steps and there are also additional illustrations of some of the steps. It is narrated by Mary Hendricks, Ph.D., director of The Focusing Institute. Viewing this tape, even stopping it on each step and going over the illustrations several times should help people actually do the steps themselves. Each step is written on the screen and there are other visual aids to help viewers keep track of which step they are seeing. A written copy of the steps is included with the tapes. We recommend this set of two tapes as the most accessible introduction to TAE.

Another series of 5 TAE tapes entirely in German language titled: "Denken wo Worte noch fehlen" was produced in 2000 and is also available now.

12 Biographical Note:

Introduction and training by Fr. Ed McMahon and Fr. Peter Campbell in BioSpiritual Focusing, was a deeply influential initiation into the world of Focusing. Further training from Dr. Eugene Gendlin and the Focusing Institute has enriched my understanding of the Focusing process, and qualified me to be a Coordinator and Trainer.

In addition, many hours of filming, editing and producing Focusing videotapes has provided me with abundant opportunities for interaction and deepening with Gene's extraordinary gift.

Recent development of "Thinking at the Edge" (TAE) has brought an exciting new growth in my professional life. I have been closely involved in the project of shaping and making TAE available to the public. We videotaped all TAE workshops. Three have been edited and produced - one is in English, one in German and the latest video "14 Steps of TAE" is presently released.

In my teaching of Focusing, I highlight Gene's philosophical ideas and in this way awake the interest for the wonderful complexity that TAE is capable to draw. I teach TAE workshops and individuals.

As Coordinator, I offer Focusing Trainer Certification Program. I give workshops internationally and as a result, many interested Focusers, who wish to work with me on their Certification, are also at international locations. I introduce new Trainees to the program during my visits to their country, and continue Distance Training via email, phone and correspondence.

I use the opportunity at International Conferences, Workshops and Focusing gatherings to videotape presenters. This gives me footage to produce instructional/educational videotapes for the Focusing community. These videotapes became popular around the world and have helped popularize Focusing in a major way.

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