

Experiment 3: Explicating your felt understanding of someone you know - a reflective practice experiment

Background

We have a *felt* understanding of everything we are experiencing ... every person, every situation, everything we are reading ... Felt understandings are an ongoing underground that underpin our experiencing meaning. In some circumstances we sit with them very productively and creatively; in others they function more like a necessary background, functioning as the root of understanding.

In conversations, our felt understanding of the people we are talking to plays a foundational role: we orient again and again from our *felt* sense of who they are and how they are likely to act, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In most conversation, this process is not obvious unless you pay attention to your own or your conversational partner's process at a fine resolution. When someone "gives us pause", though, we are likely to notice that we are sitting ruminatively with our sense of them and of how they might act here.

When we are practicing Focusing in the spirit of 'giving therapy away', we spend time principally with problems or troubles. When we are practicing Focusing as an underpinning of 'Thinking at the Edge', we spend time explicating creative edges, for new theories, projects, etc. In both these cases our focus is rather task oriented.

Having a task focus, i.e. being led by practical interests, is obviously very helpful. But we can also explore our felt understandings in a spirit of curiosity: being curious about what our understanding is, what is crossing in it, what its horizons are, how holistic it is, what questions emerge at its edges, what is being held paused or stuck in it, how it is carrying us forward, and how it might morph and perhaps transform as we let what we tacitly know or sense find words ...

When it is assumed - as it often is - that the process of making our tacit understandings explicit is simply a matter of copying from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, the power of this move may seem quite small. Nothing creative or generative is happening on this schema. Curiosity has little to contribute. But in fact our felt understanding is intricate in ways that vastly exceed what we can articulate, and the process of letting words come that express our felt understanding is one of explication: something comes that *carries forward* our felt understanding. We taste, test and weigh what comes in new ways; we draw out nuances, refine our understanding and sense further implications ... and on occasion profoundly shift our understandings. ... Because so much crosses in our *felt* understanding, and because explicating is carrying forward not reproducing, quite profound shifts in, and developments of, insight can occur.

Because our *felt* understandings of people are such an important grounding for our saying and doing, stepping back and curiously exploring our understanding - making tacit understandings explicit and examining them, seeing how well what we usually say to ourselves about the person fits our felt understanding of who they are as a whole - can help us shift in the direction of wisdom, appropriateness and skillfulness.

In Focusing practice, Focusing on social situations is usually about exploring what in particular, what concretely, it might be helpful to do in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. A curiosity-led approach brings out the possibility of exploring our underpinning understandings of each other, as such. It invites a different order of openness.

Research questions, interests

What can we learn from sitting with our felt sense of someone we know, setting current agendas aside and being simply curious?



Methods

The short form of this practice is in bold, in the left hand column below. That is all you need to look at. If you find you would like a bit more elaboration to help you get a sense of the experiential move the practice instructions are inviting, then the notes in the right hand column may help you ...

In all this work, there are no 'oughts'. You don't have to follow the instructions. Instead, rather, what you should orient from is your felt sense of your own process, and in particular what feels forward. Follow invitations that feel helpful, and put aside, or revise in some way that suits you, invitations that do not feel helpful ...

We are looking for easy gentle learnings here, because processes we find we welcome somatically are the ones we want to continue with and incorporate into our everyday lives.

The practice instructions are a scaffold to support you in your own explorations.

- 1. Entering into Focusing ...**

In any way that is familiar and comfortable ...
Clear a space if you need to, in order to feel relaxed and rested and open to doing some exploring ...
- 2. Bring to mind anyone you feel like listening to more deeply ...**

Let someone you feel like listening to more deeply come to mind ...
If multiple people come to mind, sense into who you would most like to sit with now ... (Like Gendlin's 'Clearing a Space', you can touch in with each possibility in a preliminary way, noticing which person you feel most drawn to being with now ...)
[If you are practicing with a partner, there is no need to name this person, or identify them in any way ...]
- 3. Relaxing into curiosity ...**

Exploring felt sensing, Focusing, as enquiry ...
Letting go of agendas ... letting reactions, questions sit quietly to the side ...
Relaxing into curiosity ... curiosity about who this person is ...
If you find relaxing into curiosity difficult to do, be with whatever makes that difficult in a friendly way, simply allowing it to be present in the space with you ...
- 4. Sit with your felt sense of their presence in a Focusing way ...**

What comes for you as you sit with your felt sense of their presence ...?
Ruminate, explore, wonder, ...
Some possibilities:
 - Let a sense of the *whole* of who they are come ...
 - Sensing into their presence, what stands out for you about them?
 - What edges are you curious about?
 - What questions would your felt sense of their presence like to ask you?
What questions would it like you to ask?Curiosity inspired Focusing ... the only destination we have in mind is deepening insight ... following a path shaped by what feels 'forward' (fresh, enlivening, easing, helpful, interesting, exciting, illuminating, welcome ...).
Let kindness, gentleness infuse and underly what you do. If you feel a soft (or strident!) 'no' to something you are doing or are about to do, pause, back up, and freshly consider what is actually forward for you here ...
If you find your own responses to this person coming up (subtle or vivid ... practical, loving, or troubled, ...), or you find yourself sitting with questions about how to be with this person,



be with your responses and practical questions in a friendly way, letting them be present nearby ..., and explore returning gently, for a little while, to simply understanding, to curiosity, to openness ... sitting with your sense of the whole of this person ...

5. Optional moves to explore ...

Some moves you could experiment with while you are Focusing follow. Let your curiosity lead you; you may want nothing more than usual Focusing moves; you may feel drawn to experiment with some of the following.

- i. Your sense of their presence, your sense of them, is a crossing all the way in ... So where do you sense your capacities, sensitivities, shaping what you experience them? How is your felt sense of them an expression of you? Explore how all your understanding of them is them-and-you-crossing all the way in ... (as is all their understanding of you).
- ii. Sit with: Are you in some way allowing 'the whole person' to be present here, in a way that is different from what happens in the ebb and flow of ordinary life? ... If you sense there is a difference, how would describe it?, what does it involve?
- iii. You might like to call to mind some of things you say about this person to yourself, to them, to third parties, and, treating these 'sayings' as handles, resonate them against your felt sense of the whole of the person. How well do they fit? What do they grasp? What revisions are suggested, or questions raised?
- iv. You might like to ask: What do you know you *don't* know about them? What are your *unknowings*?, your intimations of unknown unknowns ...
- v. Do you feel yourself contracting anywhere as you let a felt sense of this person be present? If yes, be curious: listen to this contracting. What is its understanding? How well does it align with yours? What does the felt sense of the person think about the contracting? Is it also contracting in response to your contracting?? ...
- vi. How relaxed, uncontracted, or contracted, does the felt sense of the person feel? Can you sense their implying?, your sense of their implying ... Explore your intuitions about where they are coming from ... in relation to you, and to life generally ...
- vii. Sit with who they are as a felt sensing being ... Although we differ in how self-consciously we listen to our felt sense of what is occurring (e.g. we differ in when and how and how often we use more sustained, holistic felt sensing microprocesses), everyone feels their own presence and situations ... There are explicatable depths in all of us ... How does sensing into their complexity (into the many things crossing in their experiencing), and how they grapple with this, play into your felt sense of their presence?
- viii. Listen to your felt sense of them, converse in a kindly way with your felt sense, as we normally would ... letting the 'conversation', the being together, unfold ... Something *a bit like* actual conversation can occur ...
- ix. Explore what some of the differences are between (i) being with the felt sense of the other person in Focusing space, and (ii) being actually *with* the person. What is resonant?, what is quite different?

If you'd like to experiment with this more radically, play with letting the other person be *actually* present with you in Focusing space, letting your felt sense of their presence morph into their presence *here* ...



(entertaining the possibility and *imagining* this is occurring, then seeing what happens, is a way to start ...).

[These last practice cues are in the direction of some unusual Buddhist practices. Some additional edges:

- Don't try to "make" anything in particular happen ...
- Rest in feeling curious and loving ...
- If you find yourself straining at all, receive the straining kindly, and relax back into curiosity ...
- Take as long as you like simply being with the other person ...
- If you feel like it, let a sense of what the other person is experiencing currently come for you ... like receiving a felt sense from being aware of their presence ... If you feel like it, perhaps allow a gentle, kindly encountering ...
- Approach all this playfully, in a light hearted spirit, simply *curious* about possibilities ...]

6. As your Focusing session is coming to a close, take a little time to review the path your explorations have followed ...

Pausing to reflect on how your understanding has shifted during the session ...

Notice how your feeling-tone towards the person is now ... and, so to speak, your orientation, stance, posture, implying ...

If your feeling-tone has shifted, notice how has it shifted; how is it different from how you usually feel when you are with this person ...?

Gently take in the learnings, insights, realisations that underpin this shift ...

7. Finding a natural end to your explorations

Letting yourself find a place where it feels natural to pause, to let enquiry rest.

Ongoing experimentation

When it feels easy, welcome, joyful, or interesting, (and only then: not when this feels uncomfortable or unwelcome),

during the coming week,

let yourself notice your felt sense of this person's presence functioning in the background when you are talking to them or thinking about them,

and, when it feels helpful to do so, slow down and let your felt sense of their presence take in the doing and thinking that is currently going on, and let your felt sense of them be enriched further by the complications that more *actuality* brings out ... relaxing, if you find you can, into a process of letting your understanding become fuller and richer ...

Let kindness, gentleness infuse and underly what you do. If you feel a soft (or strident!) 'no' to something you are doing or are about to do, pause, back up, and freshly consider what is actually forward for you here ...

You can do some version of this practice with anyone you are with or thinking about: letting yourself become aware of your felt sense of their presence, your felt sense of them, and be with your felt sense as it, as you, take in the thinking and doing that is ongoing ...

