

FACILITATING WITH PRESENCE (FROM THE IMAGINAL WORLD).

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The purpose of this paper is to highlight the need to develop a particular type of facilitation skill in our professional practice. This model of facilitation could be seen to be situated between Management Learning: – the facilitation of learning that brings about transformative changes in facilitator and those facilitated, and the transpersonal: using metaphysical skills to manifest our creativity. This type of facilitation actively evokes the imaginal world to enrich the relationship between facilitator and facilitated and brings forth the latent wisdom within the self which is rooted in the imaginal world.

Karen-Claire Voss (Voss, 1996. No 6) Introduces an article she wrote in 1996, on “Imagination in Mysticism and Esotericism” with an assertion I want to use for the foundation of the arguments presented in this article. Voss states that the imagination enables access to deeper levels of reality than those ordinarily experienced. That the imagination helps mediate between things which are conventionally perceived as ontologically separate. In particular, it permits the realm called human (the psycho-physical) to come into contact with that which is called metaphysical; in other words the imagination functions as a bridge between the microcosm and the macrocosm and is termed the mesocosm. Voss takes her understanding of imagination from Corbin’s writings on the imaginal world (Mundus Imaginalis)ⁱ

In this article I intend to bring together literature from the mystical traditions to explore the imaginal world and its influence on the quality of presence one can bring to facilitation practice. The intention is to explore the possibility of facilitating transformative change in others from a place of transformation in self. This article will advocate engagement in the imaginal world for personal transformation and to enhance presence. The proposition is that presence is a combination of the seamless blending of the worlds of the senses and the imaginal and that used together they effect significant change in self and others. Much of this thinking is influenced by John Heronⁱⁱ.

Key concepts: Imaginal World, Presence, Facilitation, Transformational change.

THE IMAGINAL WORLD

It needs to be stated at the outset that there is a basic belief that the universe is ontologically whole. If the universe is ontologically whole, then all parts of it are ontologically whole. There are no separate realities as such; the separation between the material world, the world of the intellect and the imaginal world belongs to a flawed conceptual framework. This is part of the legacy of the Enlightenmentⁱⁱⁱ. It is part of the human need to break up wholes for analysis and understanding, the need to feel in control of our world that forces us to split our realities, it is not in the nature of the universe to do this. Add to this caveat is another about what is meant by the term ‘mysticism’. Simply put the term is used for that which is unknowable. But unknowable from which reality? Taking

the example of objective causality; that everything must be preceded by a cause is system specific and within the system has its own logic. But the causes of the beginnings of human beings as a species are unknown and could be called mystical. But as Campbell states^{iv}:

“The logic of causation can say nothing about the beginnings of its own system because the beginnings lie outside that system-beyond the reach of its own causal logic. Beginnings belong to the next higher level of causality and are beyond the purview or scope of a subsystem’s own causal logic. Imagine a hierarchy of causal systems, each being a subset of the next, Thus mysticism may be removed from our own beginnings if we can obtain the perspective of the superset to which we belong”.

What is mystical for one species and people could be science for another. This is the nature of human evolution. One could say that mystics are scientists of inner space or consciousness. The word mysticism and spiritual are often used synonymously are they refer to what is still unknown about metaphysics and less if anything to do with religion.

Ontologically, we can describe three worlds; the world of the senses (the physical world), the world of the soul (the imaginal world) and the world of Pure Intelligence. Each of these three worlds has its organ of perception; the senses, the imagination, and the intellect, corresponding with the triad: body, soul and mind (This is not the human mind ordinarily understood, but the collective Silence of Creation). The place and function of the imaginal world can be summed up by:

“In this way we are not confined to dilemma of thought and extension, to the schema of a cosmology and a gnoseology restricted to the empirical world and the world of the abstract Intellect (*contentless Consciousness*). Between them there is a world that is both intermediary and intermediate, the world of the image, the mundus imaginalis: a world that is ontologically as real as the world of the senses and that of the intellect. This world requires its own faculty of perception, namely imaginative power, a faculty with a cognitive function, a noetic value which is as real as that of sense perception or intellectual intuition. We must be careful not to confuse it with the imagination identified by so-called modern man with “fantasy”, and which according to him, is nothing but an outpouring of “imaginings”.^v (My italics)

In the English language, imaginary means unreal; fantasy. This is not how it is meant by Corbin and esoteric and mystical writers, where the imaginal world is real. When we pass between different ontological realities, we cross a boundary from the sensible world where location resides and it is possible to ask the question “where” to another state where such a question makes no sense. From a Sufi description of the imaginal:

“It becomes obvious that once the border has been crossed, the question “where” becomes meaningless at least in terms of the meaning it has in the realm of sensible

experience. We are in a space out of space, hence it makes possible to give an answer to the question "where" by a gesture of the hand. What do we mean by "leaving the where"? It is not a movement of location from one place to another, a bodily transfer from one place to another as we are not moving within homogenous space. It is essential to go inward, to penetrate the interior. Yet, having reached the interior, one finds oneself paradoxically on the outside, or, in the language of our authors, "on the convex surface" of the ninth Sphere, in other words, beyond Mount Oaf". Essentially the relationship involved is that of the outer. The visible, the exoteric, to the inner, the invisible, the esoteric, or the relationship of the natural to the spiritual world. Leaving the where, the ubi category, is equivalent to leaving the outer or natural appearances that cloak the hidden inner realities, just as the almond is concealed in its shell. For the Gnostic, this represents a return home, or at least a striving in that direction"^{vi}.

This is saying that the imaginal world is found out of space and out of time. It has its own topography. When Corbin speaks of the imaginal world as ontologically real in its own right, he is asserting that there is a very precise order of reality, which corresponds to a precise mode of perception^{vii} meaning that in the imaginal world we are in a space out of space. We are neither in our usual psyche nor in the world of physical space. Corbin describes the phenomenon of **internalisation**, than is, moving through the material world to the spiritual as moving through external reality, to find spiritual reality envelops, surrounds, contains so-called material reality. In this sense spiritual reality is nowhere as the question of 'where' belongs to the material world, which is contained in spiritual reality. It is essential to understand this if one is to understand the topography of visionary experiences^{viii} and more importantly contentless consciousness^{ix}.

However we need to get over what is termed Western man's agnostic reflex since it is responsible for the divorce between thinking and being. We need to go beyond the physical world and the scientism of modern thinking where if it is not known to the five senses it does not exist. In this imaginal world creation and creative elements reveal themselves to us. This place has been called the universal ground where divining, imagining, comprising a dynamic field of imaginables – cosmic powers or agents, are to be found which uphold creation and which human imagination at a deep level refracts in generating percepts of its world.^x Many mystics and seers would say that it is the imaginal world that bridges the sensing and the intellectual worlds, and that this 'bridging' is a reality that also moves us from the terrestrial world into the spiritual or Divine Ground. This is the place where the visionary finds himself in the presence of the supernatural who reveals Himself. This is the place of soul-development and divine alchemy. Corbin's translation of the term: Nâ-Kojâ-Abâd, means the city, the land of nowhere, a place out of space, a cultivated region that is inhabited and consequently an expanse^{xi}. The nowhere relates to an entire area of the soul, to an entire spiritual culture that has no meaning in the realm of sensible experience.

Corbin offers a teaching from Sohrawardî to illustrate the moving through different realities and in relation to the work of the soul being to bath in the Spring of Life:

"He who has discovered the meaning of True Reality has arrived at this Spring. When he emerges from the Spring, he is endowed with a Gift that likens him to the

balsam of which a drop, distilled in the hollow of one's hand held up against the sun, trans-passes to the back of the hand. If you are Khezr, you, too, can pass beyond Mount Qâf without difficulty (meaning you too, can pass beyond the terrestrial world and beyond the cosmic mountain into the world of pure archangelic Intelligences)".^{xii}

The symbol of the drop of balsam held in the hand trans-passing to the back of the hand is taken to mean that it is essential to go inward, to penetrate to the interior, to become egoless, to paradoxically find oneself on the outside: the metaphysical. We need to penetrate the interior [of our being] to move through the natural to the spiritual world (ontologically speaking). Then we will find that it is the spiritual world that encases the natural world.

Mundus Imaginalis is considered the intermediary world. Imagination is the cognitive function of this world. Ontologically, it ranks higher than the world of the senses and lower than the purely Intelligible World [of pure archangelic Intelligences – not human intelligence]. The contents of this intermediary world are archetypal images of individual and singular things. In Campbell's Theory of Everything (TOE) the imaginal world is the superset from which our material world has its beginnings.

Our part in this creative process is to be receptive to these deeper levels of the imaginal: to find ways of cultivating the skill of 'thinning' the perceptual layers that divide the imaginal from the propositional layers of percept and knowing. The reason for doing this is based on the assertion that the work of the imaginal realm is to spiritualise the material and materialise the spiritual, meaning to blend the known in the material world with the unknown in the metaphysical world. The place of intuitive or empathic divining is a crucial skill in dipping into the imaginal. Imaginative association as an intuitive action shows the level of the power of the soul.

PRESENCE

The Dzogchen view of transformation is the principle of direct integration of the manifestations of energy with the state of presence. In the state of presence whatever arises liberates itself automatically.^{xiii} Essentially, that these arising thoughts/emotional energy are themselves just an expression of the non-dual awareness-energy that is the ground of our being. Presence is how facilitators stand in their energetic centre of gravity and attention during interactions with others. It is an awareness that goes beyond self-awareness, being centered and grounded in their current state of being and it is a function of their self-development and self- management. Being centered means being physically and mentally balanced, adopting an aligned posture combined with a calm mental state, and focusing attention on the presenting moment.^{xiv} Being grounded means being emotionally competent, with cognitive clarity so that other people's distress will not throw you off balance. Nevis (1991, p.2) defines presence as:

[T]he living embodiment of knowledge: the theories, the practices believed to be essential to bring about change in people are manifested, symbolised, or implied in the presence of the consultant.

And later:

[L]iving out of values in such a way that in "taking a stance", the intervener teaches these important concepts. That which is important to the client's learning is exuded through the consultant's way of being.

Nevis, who comes from a Gestalt orientation, makes a clear distinction between presence, personality and style. He suggests that a part of the facilitators' task is to provide the kind of presence which may be lacking in the client system to enable learning to occur. Heron^{xv} provides a more esoteric view of the nature of presence as outlined in the following extract:

"These three things - commitment of soul, charisma and bearing - all go together to make up presence. The result is a transfiguration of human expression in this world by potency in another world. It is as if the person is living, breathing, being and moving in two worlds at once; is in conscious command of their expression in physical space and in ka space at the same time. Hence the sense of a visitor, an entrant from the other world into this."

This view of presence is based on the notion that as individuals we are capable of mediating various types of energy/presence from another dimension (e.g. the imaginal world. Others may call it the spiritual or cosmic dimension) and simultaneously manifesting these energies in the here and now. Heron goes on to state that an individual can be trained to perform such mediation. Both he and Nevis agree that the cultivation of potent and intentional presence can be achieved over some years of self-development^{xvi}.

Satori, like the felt shift of focusing^{xvii}, seems like an immense, cosmic felt shift, where one's whole life suddenly changes, and one walks away a new being. Transformational learning is the process that brings the same kind of realization that had previously been the sole province of mystics and monasticism^{xviii} Mahamudra /Dzogchen practice can lead to transmutation, self-liberation, or spontaneous presence (p.86). The practice is to recognize one's experience as it is, without interpretation or concern from whence it has come or what one should do with it. This is emersion in the experience, to relax and abide wakefully in the experience. This non-dual awareness is your very own awareness, and is called freedom from everything^{xix}. There is something about the un-divided self that operates in presence. Presence therefore is not a reflective state. Reflection is reflection on something: on self; on the work in hand; on past events and so on. In this case self is divided to reflect on self into an object of reflection and an observing subject. This is self consciousness which is divided consciousness and has no place in presence. "This is not saying that we should go back to

prereflective identification, but that we go beyond reflection to become at-one-with our experience, through overcoming all struggles with it, through discovering and abiding in the deep, silent source from which all experience arises^{xx}. This state is **post-reflective** in that it usually follows from a groundwork of reflective work –and **trans-reflective-** in that it discloses a way of being that lies beyond divided consciousness. What finally replaces divided consciousness is pure presence or pure consciousness^{xxi}. The term **Higher reflection** is used by some phenomenologist (Heidegger & Merleau-Ponty) to try to describe this non-dual awareness, but they do not go far enough with their descriptions.

Presence is direct unmediated knowing, undivided consciousness, self-illuminating awareness, self-existing wisdom. When attention is turned outwards (out from the egoic self), perception is clear and sharp, since it is not clothed in concepts. This state becomes “consciousness-without-an-object”^{xxii} or “contentless consciousness”^{xxiii}, connected to the notion of emptiness and presence and ultimately “Emptiness and Being”. This is pure presence where experiences are non-mediated. Another aspect of presence is “Being without agenda” giving a sense of stillness, acceptance and aliveness.^{xxiv}

Training in unconditional presence or ‘consciousness without an-object’ requires^{xxv}:

1. A willingness to inquire, to face directly into the felt experience and experience what is there.
2. To acknowledge what is happening inside us, in our psyche: acknowledging implies recognizing and naming what is happening inside us, then allowing it to be there as it is, opening up to the experience – feeling, more fully. A complete opening up to, entering into, and becoming one with the felt experience, without any attempt to find meaning in it, or to do anything with it or about it.
3. Allow transmutational energy to do its work, moving emotions /feelings to the metaphysical realm.

FACILITATION SKILLS

“Facilitation literally means ‘easing’. Its art is in drawing out the wisdom already embedded and lying dormant in the psyche of the learner. One belief of humanistic education and pragmatic constructivism is that learning is a recovery of or remembering that which we already know. Some believe that this inner knowledge is lost in the plethora of what we are told we should know and from a tendency, it would seem, to forget what we know. Facilitation may thus be seen as re-awakening our latent talents and store of unconscious wisdom. Helping learners realise their capacity to learn is the hallmark of the facilitator, moving education from a delivery of static knowledge to a dialogical relationship where knowledge is co-created^{xxvi}.

It is not unusual for inexperienced facilitators to present themselves in a way which may be distracting and inhibiting. This may distract attention from the change process they are facilitating and may even create an atmosphere of insecurity or discomfort. This may result from a lack of centeredness in the facilitator accompanied by debilitating fixation on what others might be thinking of them. It may of course also be the result of other factors, for example a lack of assimilation and grounding in the subject matter of personal, group or organisational change or poor communication skills. Either way the result can lead to facilitation which may easily be dismissed or an undermining of the authority and ability of the facilitator. By authority I mean the potency, permission and protection needed for transformative change to happen. This authority is best held in presence, in the imaginal place where there is no egoic agenda. Perhaps the most common cause of lack of presence is an inability on the part of the facilitator to manage their emotions in a constructive way.

Heron highlights this point;

"The enemy of presence is anxiety. Actors often have a lot of fear before going onto the stage. It usually goes once they are out front, with the secure content of rehearsed lines which they can fill with presence. But extempore speech in everyday life may often generate a lot of subtle anxiety."^{xxvii}

For some facilitators this hurdle can be overcome by rehearsal or by helping them to relax but for others some significant personal development work may need to be done before presence in the face to face situation can be consistently achieved.

Presence as self-esteem:

Most facilitators will have experienced lack of confidence to a greater or lesser degree. This lack of confidence will usually be obvious from the facilitator's dependence on various crutches or devices, their hesitations, uncertainty etc. This usually disappears as competence, achievement and recognition emerge. It is common for many facilitators to find their competence and achievement blocked by a negative self concept. The implication is that our perception of self controls/ drives not simply what we are but significantly what we believe ourselves to be. So our belief in who we think we are affects the presence we display. If the facilitator is to display a presence which is supportive of learning then a high level of congruence between what he is, what he thinks he is and how he presents himself will be required.

"Authenticity" - being true to your self and not pretending to be something or someone you are not - is closely related to self esteem; the importance of not pretending to be something that you are not. Pretence is another enemy of authenticity and presence. Heron goes on to make similar points about self acceptance and being you from moment to moment.

Presence as attention:

Presence is related to our states of attention. Presence which tends to promote learning is related to what might be called free attention. Normally in our lives our attention is held by internal states of anxiety, distress, pleasure, fascination etc. or by external events from the spectacular and sensational to mundane personal interest. Being able to free our attention from the various distracting forces and direct attention to issues through aware and intentional choice is a skill which is essential in any training or change agent role. This is all the more important in experiential settings where the potential for distraction and deflection is enormous. The following is one way of mapping levels of facilitator states of attention.

States of Facilitator Attention

1. Facilitator shows no interest or empathy in client or subject matter - submerged in our own internal anxiety and concerns.
2. Facilitator is fascinated by subject, their distress, or the participant, to the exclusion of all else.
3. Facilitator's attention is distracted, goes off in directions irrelevant to work at hand.
4. Facilitator displaces their own distress, confusion or conflict on to participant by attacking with drawing, blaming, denial, complaining etc.
5. Control of attention energy: some attention for task in hand remainder buried, displaced, distracted etc.
6. Full attention directed to tasks in hand encompassing both own and participant's needs.
7. Attention for work in context, encompassing past and future, but immersed fully in task at hand.
8. Attention for work in context at the engaged participant level and also at the disidentified witness/monitoring level.

(adapted from Heron 1990^{xxviii})

The later states of attention (5 – 8) are obviously likely to be more effective in facilitating the learner than the earlier ones. And attention means balanced attention of the ratio of 30% out to the environment and client/ other and 70% attention to own internal states, emotional, sensory, intuitive and cognitive, with no internal conversations. Busy minds cannot be in presence as a busy mind indicates agitation/ anxiety or attachment to subject, as stated above.

Presence as disclosure and self-presentation:

While we are in the presence of other people we are making constant disclosures about ourselves both verbally and non-verbally, intentionally and perhaps unintentionally. For instance, the clothes you wear, the hairstyle you choose, the way you initiate contact and maintain it, and so on. Besides the non-verbal presentation of yourself may or may not disclose verbally something of your background, your knowledge, attitudes, goals, needs etc. Disclosure may help or inhibit the learning process and the building of the relationship necessary for your interventions to be effective. Being aware of how you present yourself to others and appropriately choosing what to disclose and how and when to disclose it will enhance your facilitation.

Developing personal presence:

Presence can be enhanced by a variety of methods for example; dis-identification with personalised and narrow perspectives, cultivation of internal and external awareness by transcending perceptive barriers. Developing personal functional capacities, that is; increased self-knowledge, charismatic training and grounding in and preparation of your subject matter. Other possibilities include development of a positive self concept, self esteem, self presentational capacities, or evocation of the higher "Self" as described under above. Sensing exercises that are non-judgmental, non-analytic and so on.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Heron^{xxix} describes four ways of knowing: The experiential, the imaginal, the propositional and the practice. This is shown as an up-hierarchy, where the term hierarchy means, return to first principles. So the first principle of knowing is immersion in experience.

The point of this exploration is that while the experiential and imaginal modes of knowing are present to a large extent in children, socialisation and school moves Western man on to the formal-operational (propositional) thinking stage quickly and by and large seeks to suppress the experiential (direct encounter) and imaginal forms of knowing. Yet, it is these forms of knowing where we are most likely to have breakthroughs into the spiritual realm.

You will find this concept of transformative learning extensively researched in some educational literature on transformative learning and mythopoeia. In Tart et al^{xxx} Chapter 7 offers a discussion on Illuminative presence where these epistemologies are identified. In terms of the "World of Image". He says:

Conclusion

If we were to juxtapose this 'other lived world' onto the injunction from mystical traditions "to see things differently"; to see differently the eternal and temporal dimensions, to see them from the point of view of eternity or greater consciousness as opposed to our temporal, localized consciousness then we will see as creations sees. As nothing changes in eternity, it is only our seeing of it that changes.

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