

Brightening Proprioception Through Breathwork

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In this workshop I offered practical ways to work with breathing in therapy sessions with individual clients and with groups. We also experimented with breathing practices that can be used by therapists for their own self-support during or between sessions.

The style of breath work we engaged in, inspired by the work of Elsa Gindler, is especially suited to addressing the tension between heightening the individual's perception of what is at the moment and risking the new through experimenting.

In the didactic overview, which preceded our practical work, I sought to differentiate this unique breath work method from meditative-type approaches (which include breathing changes without affording a way of bringing in to awareness the process whereby they occur), from directive- or retraining-type approaches (which teach change in breathing patterns without developing the individual's ground for supporting such change), and from diagnostic-type approaches (where psychological states are identified according to breathing patterns observed in the client by the therapist).

By contrast, the experiments we undertook together -- all slow and subtle in nature -- included ongoing self-observation and reporting by participants of their responses; self-descriptions of their enlarging awareness, which focused on process rather than goal; self-identifying of the ease or resistances being encountered; languaging or perceptions regarding what is needed next in movement or breath; noticing their own patterns of working at the experiments and of change and connecting these with experiences outside the sessions; and inventing new experiments for themselves as proprioceptions brightened. At the end of 2 hours, participants reported marked changes in mood, clarity of thought, energy level, and sense of connectedness with others.

Readers may obtain the complete article from Gestalt Review where it appeared in the 1998 issue, Volume 2, Number 2.