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Exploring new frontiers in
professional coaching



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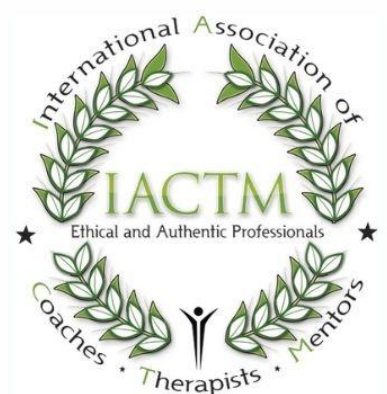


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Transpersonal Coaching Psychology Journal

introduction and acknowledgements

Lead Editor, Jevon Dängeli, MSc

Following the inaugural volume of the Transpersonal Coaching Psychology Journal (TCPJ) in 2022, on behalf of the TCPJ Editorial Team, it is with immense joy and gratitude that Volume Two is birthed.

TCPJ is an open access peer-reviewed journal that publishes coaching case study projects conducted by graduates of the 1-year Transpersonal Coaching Psychology Certificate Programme at Alef Trust.

Transpersonal Coaching Psychology (TCP) can be described as the theory and practice of coaching that takes a holistic and integrative approach to support healing and growth.

The role of a transpersonal coach is to support the client to develop a more expansive and interconnected sense of self and, in so doing, help the client to access the necessary resources (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual) that may aid in the attainment of their fullest potential and performance. This is achieved through tailored processes to help clients identify what provides them with a sense of meaning and purpose and, in turn, to assist the client in finding ways of consciously expressing this – in their work, their personal life, and within relationships.

As the TCP professional certificate programme leader at Alef Trust, it is heart-warming to witness the growth and development of our students and graduates, as they discover the riches of the TCP learning journey and the myriad ways in which they can be of value in the lives of others and in the world. This course has been evolving since 2004, when I first provided transpersonal coaching training. In 2017 I modified the training structure for online delivery according to the post-graduate course criteria at Middlesex University, who validated Alef Trust's programmes at the time. Since then, the TCP programme has continued to evolve as online learning technologies have become more sophisticated and interactive, supporting our aspiration to take the distance out of distance learning. The current infrastructure enables each cohort to co-create a participatory space, forming a close community of *TCP explorers*, known by us as "TCPers".

In the final module of their 1-year certificate programme, the TCPers undertake a 4-month coaching case study project in which they investigate the experience and outcomes of

transpersonal coaching from both their own perspective and that of their clients, culminating in a written report. Six of those reports have been peer reviewed and are included in this volume, giving readers a good insight into how TCP works and its transformative potential.

Over the years, applied TCP has become a trauma-informed methodology, as we have come to realise that many of the issues which clients present are impacted by or influenced by trauma. The transpersonal perspective offers valuable insights into the personal and collective dynamics of trauma, while providing a healing space in which trauma can be approached ethically in the context of coaching. In addition to the six case study reports featured in this volume, I have contributed the article: “Trauma-informed coaching: a transpersonal perspective”.

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous effort required to produce this journal. My heartfelt thanks go to the contributory authors of this Volume Two, the Editorial Board members* who have served as reviewers of these published reports, the Senior Editors (Hennie Geldenhuys and Jules De Vitto) for their shared vision and valuable inputs through the production process, and the TCPJ Production Manager (Jana Allmrodt), who has worked to ensure that the journal exemplifies the high quality to which we aspire in the professional field of Transpersonal Coaching Psychology. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the International Association of Coaches, Therapists & Mentors (IACTM) for granting the TCPJ their Stamp of Approval and for hosting the journal on their [website](#).

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A journey through the extraordinary ordinary

Introduction to the TCP Journal, Volume Two

Senior Editor, Hennie Geldenhuys, M.D

In a world brimming with the extraordinary, where the boundaries of human potential and perseverance are pushed to the limits, one might envision a journal that has its head in the clouds but is firmly grounded in the present reality. Welcome, then, to the second edition of the Transpersonal Coaching Psychology Journal (TCPJ). Within these pages, be prepared to encounter possibilities, imagination, creativity, resourcefulness, and realms beyond the ordinary. Yet, also take note of the hope, realism, and the call to service.

Consider, for instance, Jevon Dängeli's paper on trauma-informed coaching (Dängeli, 2023). Picture a canvas where the echoes of the past resonate in the present, where fragmented memories seek reunification, and where the body, in its innate wisdom, carries the somatic imprints of long-buried experiences. This canvas transforms into a tapestry of beauty and hope when interwoven with the pragmatic approaches of Transpersonal Coaching Psychology (TCP). Jevon underscores that many challenges we or our clients face stem from some form of trauma. Transpersonal coaching, with its holistic emphasis on open awareness, equips us with remarkable tools in this realm. The article also provides a refreshing revisit to the foundational models of transpersonal coaching and how they can be reframed within the context of trauma.

Jules De Vito (De Vitto, 2023) and Sabah Ismail (Ismail, 2023) vividly illustrate the scope of the TCP approach. Sabah reminds us that the models and practice of TCP are of service to anyone anywhere, no matter where they find themselves on the path of life or spirituality. By immersing themselves in full client acceptance, coaches help clients convert challenges into sources of growth. TCP transcends spirituality; it also encompasses real-life complexities.

Jules provides a remarkable insight into the value of the TCP approach to those of us who are both vulnerable but blessed by highly sensitive personality traits. She frames the hypothesis that not only are many of our clients likely Highly Sensitive People (HSP), but also us as coaches. Having read her important work, will you agree with Jules that our TCP approach is particularly well-suited to this context?

Then there is the natural way. Nature-based coaching, like a portal to our primal essence, invites us to acknowledge an organic and ancient truth: our connection with nature is an

inherent part of the human experience. Sheryl Clowes (2023) delves into the profound resonances that nature ignites within us. After all, the transpersonal way is nothing new or alien, it taps into the depth of who we are, and flows into what we do. It makes sense that the coaching space engineers less than it cultivates a rediscovery.

Imagine this: beings with the innate capacity to visualise, create, and innovate. Imagine a methodology that harnesses that capacity for good. Then read Mark Cantwell's (2023) and Christine Simmonds-Moore's (2023) excellent articles. It is no accident that healing modalities, and no less TCP coaching, channels and fosters imaginative creation of a new outcome. It is not so much a focus on a fix, but a dilation to include everything else in a reframe. Mark and Christine share with us their experience with this effective but also playful and refreshing approach.

So how do we start to pull all this together into a usable but magical coaching approach? It could sound complicated, but perhaps it is actually simple. Eliza-Beth Brennan (2023, p. 68) says it best in her article: "In summarising the experience as coach, the author realises, that it was the capacity to be in a state of 'intuitive beingness' over any specific doing that resulted in the emergence of the wisdom...". By being more of what we are, and trained to be, the less we need to try to do.

As we turn the metaphorical pages of this second edition of TCPJ, allow yourself, I might suggest, into a world where the extraordinary converges with the tangible. A world where our compassion and soul intertwine with knowledge, practice, and discipline. Pick up the threads of human beingness, and find that purpose.

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Trauma-informed coaching: A transpersonal perspective

Jevon Dängeli, MSc

Abstract

Unresolved trauma has no demographic boundaries and can be passed on from one generation to another. The high prevalence of trauma throughout the world today can detrimentally affect not only the direct victims of traumatic events, but also their family, community and society, as well as how those treat others and the natural world. In Transpersonal Coaching Psychology (TCP) it is recognised that many of the issues which clients present are impacted by or influenced by trauma. How coaches can work with traumatised clients ethically is discussed. Somatic approaches in coaching and the value of embodiment practice are introduced. TCP models, frameworks and guiding principles are outlined. The importance of coaching being trauma-informed and working from a transpersonal perspective is emphasised.

Keywords: trauma, trauma-informed coaching, transpersonal coaching psychology

*“You can't go back and change the beginning,
but you can start where you are and change the ending.”*
— C.S. Lewis

Introduction

Trauma is a fact of life – with devastating and debilitating effects, according to the psychiatrist and trauma researcher, Bessel van der Kolk (2015). Gabor Maté describes trauma as a disconnection from the *authentic self*, which is not necessarily the result of what happened to the person in the past, but the result of what is currently happening inside them (2022). A trauma spectrum is referred to in the literature (E.G., Scaer, 2005; Van der Kolk, 1998), based on the severity of the traumatising, with some practitioners referring to severe trauma, such as the effects of war/terrorism, physical/sexual abuse, or disaster/devastation as

big ‘T’ trauma; and the less severe types, such as the effects of interpersonal conflict, bullying, humiliation, or abrupt change, as *small ‘t’* trauma. However, an accumulation of small ‘t’ events, including attachment and attunement problems in childhood, or adverse childhood experiences can amount to big ‘T’ traumatising, understood as complex trauma (Boullier & Blair, 2018). Furthermore, the nervous system cannot always distinguish between an actual threat to physical safety, versus something relatively harmless that triggered an emotional reaction (Porges, 2011). For this reason, small ‘t’ trauma can have a similar effect as big ‘T’ trauma. Moreover, the nervous system of a trauma survivor may continue to react even when there is no immediate danger. This occurs because the brain and body have not yet found a way to process and let go of a traumatic event (Porges, 2011). Transpersonal Coaching Psychology (TCP) does not distinguish between big ‘T’ and small ‘t’ trauma, but rather concerns itself with how the traumatic experience is currently affecting the client’s life.

In his ground-breaking book, *The Body Keeps the Score* (2015), Van der Kolk draws on research and clinical experience to show how trauma literally reshapes both body and brain, compromising sufferers’ capacities for pleasure, engagement, concentration, self-control, and trust – which are among the issues that people seek coaching to resolve. He argues that trauma results in a fundamental reorganisation in how the mind and nervous system manage perceptions. Trauma changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think (2015). Van der Kolk explores innovative treatments – such as those used by transpersonal coaches, introduced in this article – that have been found to activate the brain’s natural neuroplasticity. He exposes the tremendous power of our relationships both to hurt and to heal. Research by Stjernswärd (2021) shows that early trauma and failures in attachment and attunement can affect future relational patterns, health, and well-being. They suggest that the processing of trauma, especially complex trauma, through adequate interventions may help integrate traumatic experiences, enhance health and quality of life. A fundamental aspect of TCP involves fostering a healing relationship with the client, based on empathy, compassion and open awareness.

Applied TCP is a trauma-aware and non-pathologizing methodology that promotes healing beyond symptom relief. This is achieved through creating a safe and receptive space in which clients can more successfully anchor their awareness in the here-and-now while connecting with their vital energy, thereby helping traumatised clients to (re)-engage in the present. Van der Kolk (2015) asserts that for real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present. In addition to expanding perspectives, reframing understanding, reflecting on meaning, and inspiring new ideas and/or actions (top-down), applied TCP also involves somatic and embodiment (bottom-up) processes to support the release of blocked vital energy in the body and foster integration.

Unresolved trauma has no demographic boundaries and can be passed on from one generation to another – adversely affecting all sectors in society, including how we experience ourselves individually and our collective perception of reality (Haines, 2019;

Hübl, 2020; Maté, 2022; Siegel, 2020). Due to the impact of trauma on the brain and body, as well as the pervasiveness of trauma across generations, TCP recognises that many, if not all, of the issues that clients present are the product of trauma. This article introduces how trauma-informed approaches in transpersonal coaching may support the resolution and healing of trauma on an individual and collective scale.

Evidence base informing the TCP perspective on trauma

In TCP training the importance of being trauma-informed and working in a trauma-sensitive manner is emphasised. Many resources and practice hours are dedicated to developing these competencies. Applied TCP aims to optimise the conditions for healing and integration when trauma presents, drawing from the work of Van der Kolk (2015), Schwartz (Internal Family Systems, 2021), Hübl (Healing Collective Trauma, 2020), Porges (Polyvagal Theory, 2011), Dana (Polyvagal Theory Practices, 2020), Vaughan Smith (Coaching & Trauma, 2019), Levine (Somatic Experiencing, 2008 & 2010), Haines (Somatics and social change, 2019), Maté (Compassionate Inquiry, E.G., 2022), Siegel (Interpersonal Neurobiology and attachment/attunement, E.G., 2020 & 2022), Fisher (Transforming the Living Legacy of Trauma, 2021), Scaer (trauma, dissociation and disease, E.G., 2014 & 2005), Ruppert (splitting of the psyche after trauma, 2018), and others.

In addition to the trauma related sources from above, TCP also draws from the knowledge and experience that has emerged from research and practices in the fields of Transpersonal Psychology, Jungian Psychology, and Psychosynthesis applied in coaching (E.G., Firman, 2018). Related approaches described in The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013) have also contributed to TCP, including applied mindfulness, breathwork, nature immersion and psychedelic assisted therapies. The methods used in transpersonal coaching have been emerging since the early 2000s through exploring, testing and synthesising essential practitioner qualities and skills, including their theories and guiding principles that foster healing and integration for individuals and groups.

One of the contributions that the author has introduced to the coaching field is based on the practice of soft martial arts, involving training to establish centeredness and resourcefulness even under the stress of dangerous or uncertain situations, which may help to curtail traumatisation. The key principles that underpin Judo have had a major influence in this practice, these being the effective use of energy – cultivating maximum efficiency with minimum effort, accompanied by an orientation toward mutual benefit and welfare (Kano, 2013). To this end, the embodiment practice of *jumi* - an acronym for *judo-mind* (Dängeli, n.d.1.) can serve as a practical resource in coaching sessions through developing mindful resilience and adaptability to change, as well as a means to support clients in post-coaching embodiment and integration (how *jumi* can serve this function is discussed later in the article).

Trauma triggering and tunnel awareness

In TCP, coaches have observed that most issues presented by clients involve a challenging, confusing or painful state being triggered. When triggered, the person's attention becomes narrowly fixated on the perceived source of the trigger, or on a means to avoid/repress the state that it has activated, regardless if the person is consciously aware of the trigger, or not. Whether the trigger is expressed verbally or non-verbally (e.g., locked/distant eye-gaze, a shift in breathing, physiological contraction and/or energetic constriction/retraction), the author has identified that this narrowing of perception, understood in TCP as *tunnel awareness*, is common when triggered.

According to Polyvagal Theory (Dana, 2020; Porges, 2011), in the case of trauma victims, triggering typically evokes a state of hyperarousal (e.g., fight or flight response) or hypoarousal (E.G., numbing, dissociation, helplessness). In both scenarios, the unresolved trauma from the past – ‘there & then’ (Figure 3, p. 17) – holds the person's awareness hostage, inhibiting the flow of energy and information (Siegel, 2022), therefore impairing a conscious, creative, and resourceful response. Trauma disconnects us from the present moment (Levine, 2010). Therefore, there are potential therapeutic benefits in being able to re-open one's *aperture* of awareness – from narrow and fixated, toward being more aware and in tune with the body and its environment in the present – ‘here & now’ (Figure 3). This concept is referred to as *presencing* by Scharmer (2018), a hybrid of the words "presence" and "sensing". Similarly, the *jumi awarenensing* exercises (Dängeli, n.d.1.) utilise conscious breathing in conjunction with gentle movements to access and embody the state of open awareness – thereby helping to alleviate the effects of trauma, through enabling people to feel safe and resilient in their bodies again, and more able to regulate their level of arousal according to their actual needs in the present situation.

Scharmer (2019) asserts that when one faces a moment of disruption, such as the triggering of trauma, there are two possible responses: We can close down and turn backward [toward the past] or we can open up and lean forward [toward the future]. Applied TCP involves identifying the unconscious processes and triggers, including those that result from trauma, that underpin the client's presenting issue. It does so in a natural, client-centred, and dialogical way that makes this approach versatile and effective. Clients are helped to somatically expand their sense of self and their view of the issue. This fosters a holistically resourceful state, which the client is guided to embody and integrate into the context where they experienced the issue. The process promotes the client's capacity to live more fully in the present and to open up and lean forward toward the future that they want.

Open awareness and the window of tolerance

Helping clients to access and embody *open awareness* (OA) in the contexts where this is useful to them is one of the primary aims of applied TCP. OA also serves as a means for the coach to hold a safe and compassionate space, while walking the client through a transformative passage – involving enquiry, empathic and generative listening (Scharmer, 2015), somatic awareness and opening (Haines, 2019), followed by helping the client to integrate their new, widened, and resourceful perspectives into the relevant areas of their life. The author's research explored the phenomenology of OA (Dängeli, 2020), revealing that OA bears the following characteristics:

- ***Introspection*** – metacognitive awareness in which we can mindfully observe mental activities, emotions, and somatic experiences
- ***Outrospection*** – heightened awareness of others and the ways that we relate to them, which cultivates empathy and compassion
- ***Envirospection*** – broad awareness of the space around us which connects us to everything in the environment and the cosmos

In the context of coaching, OA is a transpersonal perspective that is naturally *ecological* – beneficial for the client (introspection), beneficial for those with whom the client is in relationship (outrospection), and beneficial for the broader environment in which those relationships exist (envirospection). This three-way mutual benefit can be considered a *win-win-win* orientation.

Another important function of OA regarding trauma integration relates to what Dan Siegel (2020) refers to as the *window of tolerance* – a concept to describe the optimal zone of arousal for a person to function in everyday life. When a person is operating within this zone or window, they can effectively manage and cope with their emotions and stress levels. The victims of trauma often experience difficulty regulating emotions and stress levels, as their window becomes narrowed – an unconscious defence mechanism against threat (Siegel, 2020). Traumatized people are easily triggered if situations that activate a traumatic memory cause them to be pushed out of their window of tolerance. Due to their narrowed window, even seemingly minor stressors can cause a traumatized person to become dysregulated; resulting in anger, anxiety, or similar states of hyperarousal; or cause them to dissociate, become emotionally numb, or similar states of hypoarousal (Dana, 2020; Porges, 2011). OA skills such as jumi awarenensing (Dängeli, n.d.1.) may help to open/widen a person's window of tolerance. One of the author's clients recently reported: “There is more space in my brain to think clearly [after a jumi awarenensing exercise]”. Somatically, in the felt sense, one's window opens, allowing more light and vital energy to enter the self, which fosters a sense of clarity, vitality, and embodied mindful presence – which Hübl (2020) considers essential in the healing of trauma on an individual and collective scale.

Splitting and Disembodiment

Hyper- and hypo arousal can result in the splitting/fragmenting of the psyche, where one part relives the imprint of the trauma and another part tries to avoid anything that might remind the person of the traumatising event or activate the state associated with it (Herman, 1992; McFarlane, 2004; Van der Kolk, 2015). In an attempt to cope with the painful and/or horrific imprint of a traumatic event, the part that relives the trauma typically becomes repressed, or “exiled” as per Internal Family Systems (IFS) terminology (Schwartz, 2021). The part that tries to avoid anything which might activate the trauma memory or emotion, develops coping or defence mechanisms to serve this function. It is referred to as a “protector part” in IFS.

Parts split off unconsciously, becoming somewhat disembodied from the traumatised person’s functional body-mind system in order for the rest of the system to continue functioning (Ruppert, 2018; Schwartz, 2021). This is an intelligent survival response; however, the split off parts need to be re-integrated/re-embodied for the person to heal and return to being fully functional (Levine, 2010). Failure to integrate/embody these parts may result in blockages in the person’s vital energy flow, dysregulated states, emotional sensitivity, or numbness and powerlessness (Haines, 2019; Porges, 2011; Van der Kolk, 2015). Left unresolved, trauma affects each person differently, such as the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, sleep problems, feeling anxious, angry outbursts, depression, phobias, alcohol or drug misuse, addictions, obsessive behaviours, performance issues and physical symptoms such as pain and sickness (NHS, n.d.). Scaer (2005) describes how trauma can also be the cause of chronic fatigue syndrome and various maladies of the immune system. A pervasive consequence of disembodied parts involves losing touch with the flowing sensation of aliveness within and between us – our sense of interconnectedness (Siegel, 2022), which is arguably an underlying cause of many, if not all, relationship, and social issues (Haines, 2019; Schwartz, 2021). Therefore, an embodiment practice such as the one introduced below, engaged in under the supervision of a trauma-informed practitioner, may promote the re-integration of disembodied parts and foster a living experience of interconnectedness, thereby nurturing the healing process for trauma victims – individually and collectively.

Embodiment Practice

A fundamental aspect of applied TCP involves embodying and integrating expanded states of consciousness. In this way, TCP not only promotes widening and deepening one’s perception of reality, thereby more fully perceiving the interconnectedness of life, but also involves exploring ways to apply one’s expanded awareness practically in everyday life. For this reason, TCP students, practitioners and clients are encouraged to engage in an embodiment practice. The embodiment practice example below focuses on group participation, but it can also be done by oneself, and it can be adapted to serve as a post-coaching practice according

to the client's needs, which may be of particular value for clients who suffer from the effects of trauma.

Over the past two decades of experimenting with embodiment practices in groups, including both in-person and online settings, TCP practitioners have discovered that the energy of the group's collective field/consciousness may become amplified, enhancing somatic OA for most participants, and potentially enabling them to become aware of split off parts and coping/defence mechanisms that they were previously not conscious of. Hübl's work with groups (2020) has identified similar phenomena.

The following steps outline one example of a group embodiment practice that the author has developed (Dängeli, n.d.2.), which can be adapted for practising by oneself:

1. **Collective centering** – intentionally co-creating a safe and conscious participatory space.
2. **Somatic open awareness** – gentle meditative movements and breathing exercises to promote vital energy flow and an expanded sense of self – practised standing or seated (E.G., Jumi awarenessing).
3. **Somatic experiencing and mapping** – embodied witnessing and making a *somap* (somatic map) of what is alive/present in one's soma (bodily sensations, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and behaviour).
4. **Embodied inquiry** – sharing experiences and somaps, exploring common themes and what is emerging/unfolding in the group's shared space – collective sensemaking.
5. **Integrating** – embodied journaling of one's core insight from the session, clarifying one's response to the insight, and committing to a personal embodiment practice.

The above embodiment practice example has emerged through the applied domain of TCP, involving Jumi and related somatic OA approaches. There are also other embodiment practices, such as those described by Dana (2020), Haines (2019), Levine (2010), and Van der Kolk (2015). It is important that the facilitation of any embodiment practice for an individual or a group is guided by a trauma-informed practitioner.

Transpersonal Coaching Models and Frameworks

In this section, three trauma-informed TCP models and frameworks are introduced that the author has been co-developing, along with input from other practitioners and feedback from

clients since the inception of this methodology in 2002. Although these models and frameworks have been written about more extensively in the cited sources below, here they are introduced according to their relevance in trauma-informed coaching.

1. The Open Awareness Integral Process

A flexible framework used by transpersonal coaches when facilitating groups is the OA Integral Process (Figure 1) (Dängeli, n.d.3.). This is a systematic, yet completely customisable approach to help groups of any size to address organisational and global issues. It does so through the means of mindfully harnessing the group's collective consciousness, combined creativity, and energy for ecological enactment. A unique feature of this process is the co-creation of a *participatory space* — characterised by openness, multisensory perception, and a deep sense of interconnection, which in turn promotes inclusivity, mutuality, empathy, compassion, embodied presence, and co-regulation (Dängeli, n.d.3.). Trauma practitioners advocate the importance of cultivating these qualities in the facilitation of collective trauma healing, E.G., Dana (2020), Fisher (2021), Haines (2019), Hübl (2020), Van der Kolk (2015), Maté (2022), Siegel (2022), and Vaughan Smith (2019); therefore, the OA Integral Process may be considered a trauma-sensitive and healing approach for coaches who work with groups.

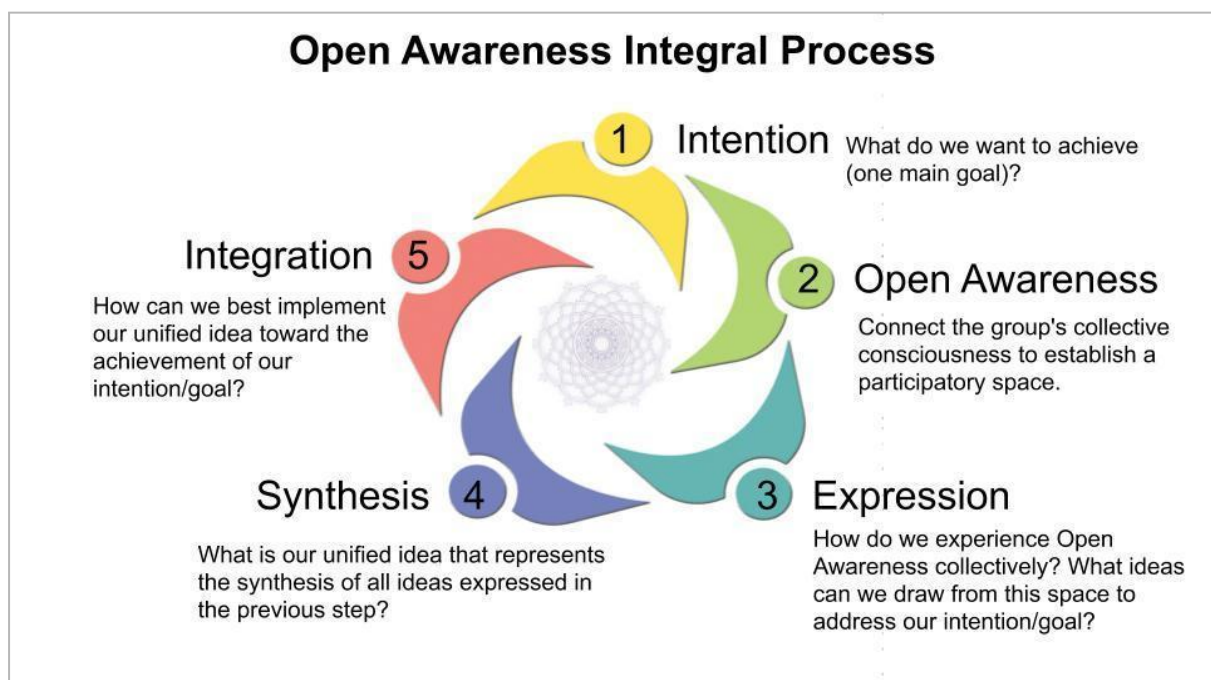


Figure 1.

2. The Transpersonal Coaching Model (TCM)

The TCM (Dängeli, 2022) (Figure 2) shares a core function with the OA Integral Process, that being a means to help clients – individuals and groups – to access and embody OA in the contexts where this is useful to them. However, the TCM also includes two distinct directions/processes that help practitioners to address a broad range of issues through this holistic and integrative coaching methodology.

In the case of trauma, the transpersonal coach identifies if the client's activated state is one of hyperarousal or hypoarousal, and the respective trigger is elicited. With the client's state as a starting point when using the TCM, in the instance of hyperarousal, applying this model in its clockwise direction is indicated. In the instance of hypoarousal, applying the TCM in its anticlockwise direction is indicated. As shown in Figure 2, the TCM is depicted as a spiral. Both directions/processes involve moving along the continuum of the spiral from the client's triggered state, toward their desired state and new response. The segments of the TCM serve as optional steps – with each one providing an opportunity for exploration and insight. The coloured layers of the spiral indicate the overlapping levels on which the process can focus – as per the client's response on each step. Naturally, there may be instances in which both hyperarousal or hypoarousal manifest in the coaching process, in which case both versions of the TCM can be applied in a single coaching session, or over a series of sessions.

An in-depth discussion of these directions/processes is beyond the scope of this article, but comprehensively laid out in the Transpersonal Coaching Handbook (Dängeli, 2022). It should be noted that the TCM is primarily a conceptual framework – providing two complementary processes and guidelines for coaches to draw from in a manner that honours the client's needs and adapted fluidly according to their unfolding process.



Figure 2.

3. The T Model

Applied TCP also utilises a foundational framework, the T Model (Figure 3), underpinning the other transpersonal coaching methods for individual and group coaching.

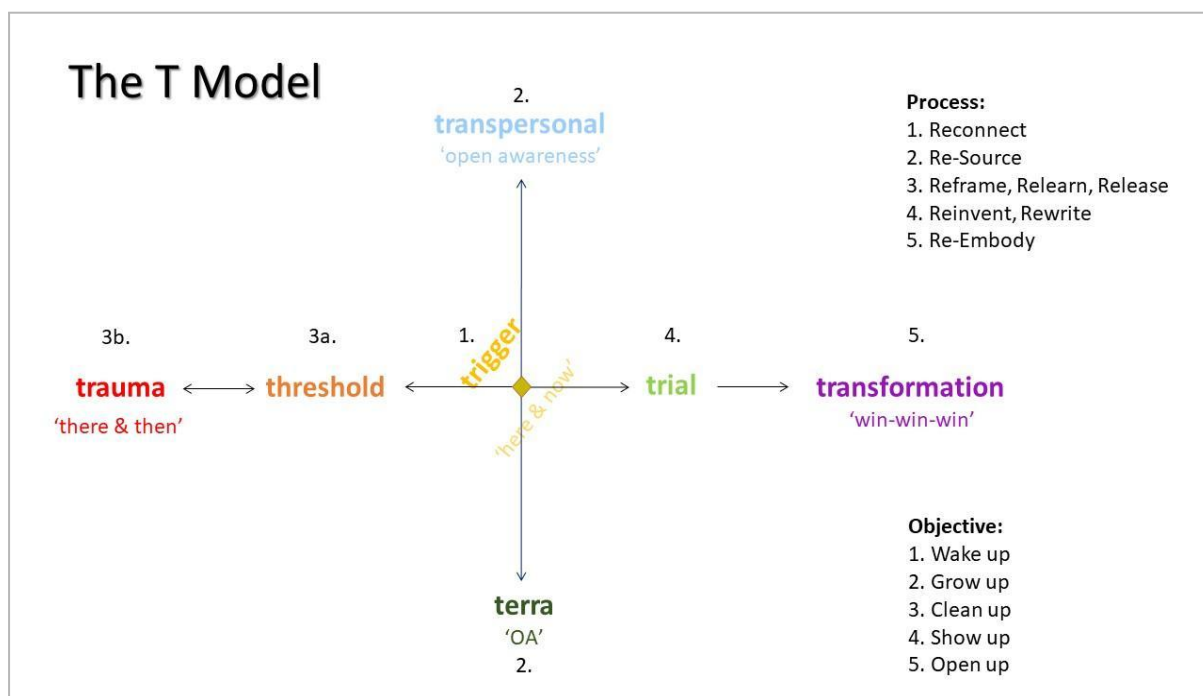


Figure 3.

The T Model includes five phases of a transpersonal coaching approach that can be tailored according to the client's presenting issue, goals, and based on what emerges for the client as their process unfolds. If identified as helpful for the client, the T Model can serve as a single coaching session structure, in which the coach can permissively guide the client to navigate and progress through their process according to the five phases of this model, as outlined below and illustrated in Figure 3:

1. The coach helps the client to consciously identify the trigger of their presenting issue.
2. The coach assists the client to access open awareness, emphasising the somatic experience of OA, to whatever extent this is achievable for the client. A subsequent aspect of the OA facilitation may involve the client establishing an overview perspective (view from above), and/or a rooted in earth (terra) perspective (view from below).
3. In 3a, through the embodied state and perspective of OA, the client can identify where their issue comes from, the part (subpersonality or shadow aspect) that has been

triggered, and the behavioural pattern that it is responsible for. The “threshold” shown in Figure 3, represents the outer rim of the client’s window of tolerance (Siegel, 2020). When trigger activation propels the client’s state beyond their threshold, either hyperarousal or hypoarousal manifest, showing up behaviourally as a coping/defence mechanism, or the enactment of a protector part (Schwartz, 2021). Through the subsequent transpersonal coaching process, the client recognises the objective of the mechanism and/or the needs of the protector part, and they are supported in formulating a new/ecological means to fulfil those needs.

Phenomena associated with 3b, trauma, may naturally occur in the coaching space if the client spontaneously accesses a traumatic memory, and/or a deep wound, and/or an emotional injury - originating from their past. This may show up as a somatic manifestation, and/or mental image, and/or intense emotion, when contact is made with an exiled part (Schwartz, 2021). In such instances, the role of the transpersonal coach is to maintain embodied presence, while supporting the client to anchor somatic OA, thereby co-creating a safe space for the client to process their experience and to release the energy of the trauma in a way that feels natural to the client. Trauma energy can be released in various ways, including emotional discharge, physical trembling/shaking, jumi *awarenessing* exercises (Dängeli, n.d.1.), or other forms of somatic catharsis (E.G., Klopstech, 2005).

4. Once the needs of the protector part are understood and the trauma energy is released (if an exiled part was accessed), the integration of the parts and of the client’s new response in the triggering situation is put to “trial” (Figure 3). This involves the client being in OA while actively imagining potential future scenarios that would ordinarily trigger them. Each successful - non-triggering - visualisation, deepens/embodies the change more, instilling confidence in the client that they can sustain their new/desired state in scenarios that used to be triggering. If the client is still triggered, this indicates that the process in 3a needs further attention, in which case the coaching cycles seamlessly back to that phase and continues forward from there.
5. Once the trigger’s former effect is neutralised and the client displays congruence/alignment with their new state, this final step in the process then involves the coach helping the client to establish an ecological (win-win-win) means of enacting their change in the relevant context/scenario, with the client committing to that enactment. Lastly, with the coach’s support, the client identifies a practice/exercise that they can engage in regularly to continue embodying their new state, thereby promoting transformation. TCP adopts a range of definitions for transformation, including:

- A radical change that arises from deep awareness and leads to a fresh orientation and new direction (Kellog, Michaels & Brown, 2011).

- A transformation of identity accompanied by an enhanced sense of meaning in life (Hunt, 2007).
- Experiences that dissolve the understanding of self and create a new [expanded] one (Taylor, 2013).

Ethical considerations

Since transpersonal coaching utilises expanded states and perspectives, these coaching processes quite frequently enter the *grey space* – where psychotherapy and coaching intersect. Transpersonal coaches undergo extensive training in how to hold this liminal grey space with care, compassion, and open awareness. In so doing, the root causes of clients' issues may be unveiled, including deep wounds and trauma, if that exists for the client. Conventional forms of coaching steer away from confronting those underlying issues, sometimes leaving the client feeling fragmented, confused, or overwhelmed. However, in TCP it is recognized that these phenomena cannot be ignored and that it is not always appropriate for the coach to immediately refer a client to a therapist that the client is not familiar with when they have entrusted the coach to help them. In these cases, compassionate support and guidance for integration are crucial, and this is one of the hallmarks of applied TCP. Transpersonal coaching competencies (Dängeli, 2022) involve knowing one's scope of practice, so that it can be identified if the client should be referred for psychotherapy and/or clinical care. Being trauma-informed, transpersonal coaching can serve as a complementary modality for clients who are undergoing psychotherapy.

TCP respects the legitimacy and potential relevancy of medically unexplained symptoms (e.g., persistent physical complaints, such as dizziness or pain), as well as parapsychological/PSI phenomena (e.g., clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, or extrasensory perception), while recognising that these may be underpinned by trauma. In mainstream healthcare, these symptoms and phenomena may unfortunately remain unnoticed, neglected, misunderstood, or pathologized (Lukoff, 2007). While it is important to identify if the client requires clinical care, it may be equally important to help the client to cope with, make sense of, and integrate their nonsensical, abstract, or profound experiences in a non-clinical setting.

TCP training involves learning how to identify the key differences between psychosis and spiritual awakening experiences (Grof, 2000), acknowledging that trauma might be causal in both instances (Taylor, 2021). In all cases, the role of the transpersonal coach is to hold a safe space while enabling the client to observe their experience from the embodied perspective of open awareness, which in turn supports the client to learn from their experiences, including those that were perhaps overwhelming or traumatising. Unlike some traditional methods in psychotherapy that may have the client enter painful memories repeatedly, transpersonal

coaches help their clients to access relevant memories and resources through the state of somatic open awareness – anchored in the present and with access to the bigger/fuller picture, by establishing an overview perspective – which, in turn, may fertilise the ground for the potential of healing, transformation and post-traumatic growth (Taylor, 2021).

Another important ethical consideration for all transpersonal practitioners, which TCP embraces, is that the practice entails being careful to not employ spirituality as a coping mechanism. Moreover, transpersonal practitioners should take measures to avoid *spiritual bypassing* (Wellwood, n.d.), which is the tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep confronting psychological wounds, unresolved emotional issues, and developmental impairments. TCP acknowledges that it is possible for a person to be on a spiritual path and not deal with their trauma, as much as it is possible to be over-consumed with one's own individual trauma while losing connection with the wider transpersonal perspective of human existence. In general, the role of a transpersonal coach is to support clients (individuals and groups) to develop the quality of embodied presence that emanates an awareness of universal interconnectedness and, in so doing, helps them to access the necessary resources (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual) that may optimise their inner healing potential and their outer performance in all areas of life.

Guiding principles

In practice, trauma-informed coaching from a transpersonal perspective means that coaches should:

- Recognize the prevalence of trauma, and explore its causes and effects from a systemic, collective, intergenerational, and transpersonal perspective.
- Be able to identify trauma symptoms in clients, as well as notice and feel their own trauma symptoms.
- Understand how trauma can impact the body and mind, including decision making, behaviours, and relationships.
- View the trauma response as a valid attempt to cope with the current imprint and internal experience of something that has happened to the person, rather than something that is wrong with the person.
- Acknowledge that trauma is not a curse, but an opportunity for healing, growth, and transformation.
- Undergo supervision with a trauma-aware supervisor or mentor and regularly engage in embodiment practice.

Conclusion

Trauma-informed approaches in coaching may support the resolution and healing of trauma on an individual and collective scale, by helping to neutralise the effects of trauma triggers and supporting trauma victims to feel safe and resilient in their bodies. To aid this process, the value of a transpersonal perspective in coaching, in particular applied open awareness, has been emphasised.

TCP can be understood as the theory and practice of coaching that takes a holistic and integrative approach to nurture healing and post-traumatic growth. By recognising and working sensitively with trauma when it presents in coaching sessions, transpersonal coaches can utilise somatic open awareness skills, TCP models and frameworks, as well as embodiment practice. These are all informed by ethical considerations and guiding principles to create a safe space for clients to process and potentially resolve the effects of trauma, while optimising the conditions for the potential of transformation.

Through client-centred and trauma-informed coaching, along with embodiment practice, applied TCP takes a broad-spectrum approach to help clients live more fully in the present so they are able co-create a more loving and ecologically sustainable world. Transpersonal coaching involves moving beyond mere surviving — toward thriving – individually and collectively.

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An interpretative case study exploring open awareness within transpersonal coaching for highly sensitive people

Jules De Vitto, MSc

Abstract

This interpretative case study explored how the practice of open awareness, held within the container of transpersonal coaching psychology, was experienced by three highly sensitive coaching clients over the course of ten sessions. Data was collected through feedback forms and critical incidents. Inductive data analysis was used to identify three themes which include: Trusting the Process, Deeper Listening and a Safe Container. The results which emerged from the analysis indicated that open awareness within transpersonal coaching sessions can enable the highly sensitive clients to experience greater trust in their process; connect with something more 'sacred'; cultivate interoceptive awareness; attend to other ways of knowing and engage with the emergence of unconscious material within a held container.

Keywords: highly sensitive people, transpersonal coaching, open awareness, liminal space, other ways of knowing

Introduction

The scientific term for the Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) is Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS) and although levels of sensitivity exist on a spectrum, research highlights that around 20% of the population demonstrate the temperament of SPS (Aron, 1996a). It is associated with greater sensitivity to environmental or social stimuli and correlates with more significant brain responses responsible for awareness, memory, self-other processing and empathy (Acevedo et al., 2014). HSP tend to be very intuitive and connected to nature, yet can be prone to emotional overwhelm, burnout or anxiety leading them to seek support in the form of coaching or therapy. Dr Elaine Aron has suggested that around 50% of clients seeking therapy are Highly Sensitive (Aron, 2010), and I have experienced similar statistics apply in the context of transpersonal coaching.

Transpersonal coaching is an integrative and holistic approach encompassing all levels of one's experience, including both conscious and unconscious phenomena. A transpersonal coach acknowledges that there is a relationship between mind, body, soul and spirit and integrates both the spiritual and psychological domains into the coaching process. A fundamental distinction can be made between transpersonal coaching and more traditional approaches to life coaching; in transpersonal coaching, the client and coach enter into expansive states of consciousness through the technique of Open Awareness (OA) (Dängeli, 2022). This involves the coach and client opening the aperture of their awareness to enter into a liminal space encompassing introspective, extrospective and somatic awareness (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2018). The liminal space is synonymous with a held space that is open, receptive and encourages the regulation of one's thoughts, feelings and actions (Dängeli, 2022). OA also allows for unconscious material to emerge through bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts, and imagery, enabling access to other ways of knowing (Braud, 2011), which are pertinent to the client's coaching process. This case study explored how HSP experience the emergence of unconscious material within the liminal space that is induced by OA in transpersonal coaching sessions.

Dr Elaine Aron has identified that HSP have a thinner boundary between their conscious and unconscious mental processes and are more able to access content from the collective unconscious (Aron, 2011). The collective unconscious consists of what Carl Gustav Jung (1876-1961) referred to as archetypal knowledge - which includes symbolic images and patterns that are present in the psyches of all individuals regardless of culture or individual experience (Jung, 1980). I have observed this 'thinner threshold' in my highly sensitive coaching clients, where they appear to enter into liminal states of OA more readily. This manifests as the sharing of numinous dreams, intuitive insights and images or symbols which arise within the coaching sessions. Jung (1980) theorised that individuals can achieve greater individuation and wholeness by exploring and integrating the archetypes and symbolic images that arise from the personal and collective unconscious. The personal unconscious includes material and images that are more pertinent to the individual, whereas the collective unconscious contains archetypal images shared by all mankind (Jung, 1980). Therefore, understanding how these images may be experienced and integrated by HSP in the context of transpersonal coaching sessions is deemed as significant.

Literature highlights that one of the core components of HSP is a sensitivity to subtleties, which can often be experienced as nervous system dysregulation or a tendency to be easily overwhelmed by sensory or emotional stimuli (Aron, 1996). This case study arose from a curiosity as to whether the experience of OA and transpersonal coaching can help HSP not only navigate emotional and sensory overwhelm, but also provide a held container that fosters the emergence of unconscious material. As a transpersonal coach working with highly sensitive people I was curious to explore how transpersonal coaching encourages the processing and integration of this material in a transformative and resourceful way. A review of the literature to date highlights that there is no current research on how HSP experience

such phenomena in the context of transpersonal coaching. This case study allows for the first-person experience of highly sensitive clients to be explored in more depth.

Method

The case study focused on three participants who meet the criteria for sensory processing sensitivity, according to Dr Elaine Aron's self-test assessment (Aron, 1996b). The participants were part of an online training course learning how to coach highly sensitive people from a transpersonal coaching perspective. As part of the course, each participant engaged in ten peer-to-peer coaching sessions over a 3-month period and the research focussed on their experience of receiving the coaching sessions from their peers. The participants who took part in this case study signed a consent form which included information on confidentiality, a right to withdraw and ethical considerations. Pseudonyms have been used in this report for reasons of confidentiality.

A case study is an inquiry into a particular group or phenomenon that takes place within a real-life context (Yin, 1984). This case study is interpretative, as it aims to explore and gain a more in-depth understanding of how applied open awareness within transpersonal coaching sessions is experienced by highly sensitive people. The case study is bound by a period of ten coaching sessions within a 3-month period. The data was collected through feedback forms consisting of open-ended questions and critical incidents. Critical incidents are the recording of particular events that offer important insight into the case study and are therefore used as data (Flanagan, 1954). Inductive data analysis was used to identify themes, patterns, and categories that emerged from the data (Patton, 1980). Using the language extracted from the participants, three themes were formed and are shared in this report. The themes are Trusting the Process, Deeper Listening and a Safe Container.

Results

Trusting the Process

Sam received transpersonal coaching sessions for navigating stress, overwhelm and indecision surrounding his next steps. He related his struggles to his temperament of sensitivity and a tendency to overthink decisions and procrastinate. He shared that one of the most significant outcomes of his transpersonal coaching sessions was a 'trust' that emerged in his journey and a 'letting go' of overthinking his next steps. There was a lessening of the analytical mind and an ability to surrender to something 'greater than himself'; a trust in something 'sacred' that he felt was supporting him on his journey:

I was overworking and trying to figure everything out; in the sessions insights occurred to me. Rather than them overwhelming me as my thoughts usually do, there was a peace, that I am being guided by something greater

Sam shared how the practice of OA enabled him to engage with other parts of himself that appeared to know what he needed:

Images and flashes of insight would come up as if there was a part of me that already knew what was going on and what I needed. I had an image of an open book with blank pages, it might not seem significant but I just knew what the image of that book was showing me.

This is suggestive of how the liminal space, created through OA, may nurture a sense of interconnection between oneself and other phenomena. Sam also indicated that there was an increased quality of acceptance surrounding his experience. This supports previous research which proposes that OA enables a reframe of one's current experience as well as fostering a mindful mode of perception (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2018). This ability to trust and let go of the analytical mind also suggests a regulation of the nervous system and an entering into what has been referred to as the window of tolerance (Siegel, 2010). This is critical for highly sensitive people who are often overstimulated and struggling to find clarity on their next steps because they are experiencing nervous system dysregulation; hyperarousal or hypoarousal (Aron, 2011).

Deeper Listening

Two clients shared how the practice of OA within the coaching sessions offered them the capacity for 'deeper listening'. Anna described this deeper listening as follows:

I was able to really pay attention to what was going on in my body as well as imagery in my mind's eye

Anna was struggling with feeling overwhelmed and burnt out in her current job as an art teacher. She shared that in OA, she was able to listen more deeply and connect to an embodied awareness which offered her insights she had not considered before the coaching session:

I suddenly had an experience of feeling a heavy weight on my chest area, like an iron pressing down and saw an image of myself dragging these sort of weighed down bags behind me

Anna went on to share how she came to this embodied awareness of her 'carrying too much responsibility'. The coach gently guided her with the question, 'What is needed?' and she received insight via an image of a bridge. She understood this bridge to be symbolic of her need for more support regarding whether she can move forward in her career. She

experienced a visceral shift, a lightening in her body and an experience of her chest feeling more expansive and open.

Sarah struggled with overcommitting herself to work and social events and identified as a 'highly sensitive people-pleaser'. As a result, she tended to feel guilty, burnt out and neglected her own feelings and needs. She described her experience of OA in the coaching sessions as giving her 'space to listen':

I experienced something, sort of, as coming home to myself. It's as if I was able to connect within myself rather than being consumed by my thoughts, or the energies of the world around me which I usually end up feeling are too much

Sarah experienced that OA not only gave her a feeling of 'becoming larger in her body', but it enabled her to come into a deeper connection and knowing of the emotions held with her body. This feeling of affective knowing held within the body, and a felt sense of becoming 'larger' can be understood as a proprioceptive experience or knowing (Siegel, 2018). Additionally, this correlates with the understanding that OA cultivates a receptivity to one's internal and external perceptual field (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2018). Sarah emphasised how 'wonderful' this felt because, as a HSP, she often felt 'drowned out or overwhelmed by the world around her'. Her experience resonates with the literature highlighting that HSP do have a sensitivity to subtleties (Aron, 1996) and as a result benefit from finding ways to listen more deeply to one's feelings and needs.

Sam described how the coaching sessions helped him come to a particular decision about his career, and this insight occurred to him through visceral sensations in his body:

I felt it in my stomach. When [the coach] asked me what was arising in that moment and I imagined what was most important to me, I had a tingling sensation all over my body, it was as if a light had switched on, I just knew this was the right step for me. Before the session I was still feeling confused, I was stuck in my mind

This theme relates to the concept of other ways of knowing (Braud, 2011) and supports how OA simultaneously enables an introspective, extrospective and somatic awareness as well as a flexible and dynamic state that enables clients to access a variety of channels of perception (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2018). It also feeds into the next theme of a Safe Container.

A Safe Container

The participants all described how OA within the coaching sessions gave them a sense of 'safety' and 'containment', which they felt in relation to their coach and also towards themselves. Anna shared how she is sensitive to energies around her, and this is something she struggles with as a highly sensitive person. However, in the coaching session, she shared:

I felt safe and held in the session, something in my nervous system relaxed and there was a letting go of some tension in my forehead

Anna went on to share how this 'energetic bubble' created in the session enabled her to access and explore emotional content and thoughts around her decision making that were usually confused or overwhelming for her. There was a sense of the content being contained, while at the same time, there was enough space to work with the material she had brought to the session. Sarah echoed this feeling when she shared:

The session enabled me to relax into my body and I almost had a feeling that I could make sense of a lot of different sensations and thoughts that were usually jumbled up and feeling overwhelmed by

This theme highlights how the embodiment of OA for the highly sensitive client provided a held and safe space that was simultaneously 'contained' yet expansive enough to be able to work with the material that emerged in the session, and engage in subject matters that the highly sensitive clients usually found overwhelming. It supports the concept that OA forms a metaphorical containment which enables the clients to engage in their material. The concept of containing can be likened to an alchemical container where the thoughts and feelings of both coach and client need to be held safely so that transformation can occur (Jung, 1946). Siegel (2018) also speaks to the importance of expansive states of awareness within the held space and how the client and coach are able to enter into spiritual resonance through the formation of this strong container.

Discussion

This interpretative case study resulted in three themes: Trusting the Process, Deeper Listening and a Safe Container. In the first theme, the participants shared how OA within the transpersonal coaching sessions facilitated an awareness of interconnection; an ability to trust in their transformative journey as well as connect with something greater than themselves, which was described as 'the sacred'. The second theme highlights how the participants experienced an ability for 'deeper listening' that was embodied yet expansive, supporting how OA fosters an introspective, extrospective and somatic awareness (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2018). The participants also experienced the emergence of other ways of knowing through images and bodily sensations (Braud, 2011). The final theme shared how the clients experienced the coaching sessions as a 'safe container' in which they could explore their material in a contained yet spacious and manageable way - synonymous with the concept of an alchemical container. The participants in this study as well as the scientific research, have highlighted how HSP often feel overwhelmed or overstimulated by emotional and sensory stimuli (Aron, 2011); therefore, this balance of containment and space to process emotional and sensory material is particularly relevant for HSP. It supports how the practice of OA is

positively transformative for highly sensitive clients - enabling them to gain new perspectives and insights. The case study has allowed for a more in-depth exploration of how HSP experience transpersonal coaching sessions and the results may assist other transpersonal coaches in understanding the experience of working with highly sensitive clients. However, some limitations are inherent to the methodology of a case study; the case study focussed on a small sample of participants and was carried out within a limited period of time. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised to all Highly Sensitive People and also cannot conclude whether the participants' experiences are unique to HSP.

Conclusion

This report has shared the experience of three highly sensitive people receiving transpersonal coaching sessions and has directly explored how the clients responded to OA and the liminal space which emerged within the coaching sessions. The results indicate that OA strengthened their ability to reframe their current experience, gain new perspectives and enter into more mindful states where they are neither in hyperarousal or hypoarousal. The highly sensitive clients also encountered significant insights pertinent to their journey by accessing unconscious material through other ways of knowing and included introspective and proprioceptive awareness (Siegel, 2018). Overall, the emerging themes suggest that OA and the transpersonal coaching sessions were beneficial to the clients' transformation and ability to navigate emotional and sensory overwhelm. Further research is recommended into the application of OA, the experience of liminality and how HSP access the unconscious, collective unconscious and other ways of knowing within transpersonal coaching sessions.

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Five key learnings on the human experience gained through transpersonal coaching

Sabah Ismail

Abstract

In this report, the author explores how transpersonal coaching can benefit people from a variety of backgrounds, irrespective of the presence or absence of an existing spiritual path. The author also documents five common themes that arose through working with seven clients from very different backgrounds who were each at very different points in their spiritual journeys, thus highlighting our common humanity. The author explores how these themes arose *through* transpersonal coaching sessions and what they can teach us about the shared human experience.

Keywords: spiritual journey, human experience, open awareness, transformation, trauma

Introduction

The holistic and integrative approach of transpersonal coaching is something I experienced the tremendous benefits of first-hand, as a client. I was curious to see whether this type of coaching could positively impact people from various backgrounds irrespective of whether they had a clearly defined spiritual path or mindfulness practice. For this reason, when seeking pro-bono clients, I had no set requirements for the people I wanted to work alongside. I had the honour of serving ten clients from very different backgrounds, who were all at varying stages of their spiritual journeys. For the purpose of this report, I will be referring to seven of these clients who had between 2 - 6 sessions each.

I was curious to learn what common themes would unfold through these sessions. Would each client be able to reach an expanded state of Open Awareness, broadly defined as “the flow of pure experience interconnected with the rest of reality” (Dängeli, 2019, p. 7). How could transpersonal coaching unite the human experiences of all of my clients? What could I learn that would help me to better understand the human experience? What would I discover through working with such different people that would allow me to better serve future clients, and humanity on the whole?

Method

Having gained their permission through our online video coaching sessions to share these details, here is some background on each client. I have used pseudonymised initials to reference them.

1. DB: White British male, aged 30. An artist working as an art teacher and has been on his spiritual path for a number of years.
2. LT: White female, late forties, British expat living in the USA. Married mum-of-two, who did not have a spiritual path or any kind of practice. Was very new to working with the transpersonal.
3. DLB: White British female, late twenties. Experienced a kundalini awakening over a year ago.
4. MA: White Spanish female, early twenties, living in the Netherlands. Art student. No spiritual path or practice, very new to working with the transpersonal.
5. BE: Black American Male, early twenties. Began his journey of awakening around 2 years ago.
6. VB: White Slovakian female, late thirties, living in the UK. Mum-of-two, a shamanic healer who has been on her spiritual journey for 10+ years.
7. AK: Japanese female, mid-thirties, living in Canada. Mum-of-two, no spiritual path or practice.

With transpersonal coaching being such a fluid process, I approached each session without rigidity or expectations. It was all about being in a co-created safe space together and being in a state of allowing. The Transpersonal Coaching Model (Dängeli, 2022) was followed loosely in most sessions to direct the conversation, and I experienced great success in bringing the Authentic Self to life with the Authentic Self Empowerment (ASE) methods of Now and Future Resourcing and Parts Integration (Dängeli, 2018). I also utilised a spin on Richard Schwartz's Internal Family Systems method (2021), creative writing prompts and guided drawing exercises. I trusted myself to be guided by the process and used the method most appropriate to what was unfolding in the session and most suited to my client.

I wrote up notes from each session immediately after each session took place, highlighting the key areas in which the client and I worked together. I documented how the client felt at the start of the session, the issues that arose, the insights that came through and how the client

felt at the end of the session. Using these notes and feedback obtained from each client, I was easily able to identify common themes from among my sessions.

Results and Discussion

My experiences with each of the aforementioned clients were unique and special in their own way, overall leading to positive changes, greater clarity and in some cases, transformation.

Despite every session with each client being unique, upon studying my notes and the feedback attained, I was easily able to spot common themes - uniting my clients in their transpersonal coaching experiences and giving me reason to believe that these learnings may be a part of the common human experience for us all.

However, please note that due to the limitations of the scope of this report, these results cannot be applied as a definite generalisation to the entire population, but do show what *can* arise for clients during transpersonal coaching sessions.

1. We all need to be heard

By adopting an approach of Heart-Centred Listening, as outlined by Hulnick & Hulnick (2010), we create “an experience of Acceptance, Communion and Oneness”; for when a person feels heard, he or she also feels loved” (p.35).

Every client expressed how good it felt to talk and to be received. Both MA and AK were unfamiliar with the transpersonal and from all of my clients, appeared the most guarded at first. However, after her first session, MA shared that she felt she was in a safe space to “*express the things I had to say in any way*” and AK expressed after her second session, “*my body feels lighter and I’m happy that someone knows my story*”.

After every first session with each client, where they were able to openly talk and share whatever they wanted about their life journey so far, there was a noticeable shift in body language and facial expression. By the end of the session, each client appeared more relaxed and happier, in contrast to the beginning. I attribute this largely to them feeling heard, and I can attest to this tremendously myself through my own experiences being coached.

2. Open Awareness (OA) is accessible to people from all walks of life

This is one area that I was particularly keen on exploring and observing when working with pro-bono clients. I was experiencing some anxious thoughts surrounding my clients who were not on a clear spiritual path or who didn’t have any kind of mindfulness practice, wondering whether we would be able to reach an expansive state of OA together. Would they be put off? Would they even want to continue our sessions as I guided us towards OA? These

anxious thoughts were put to rest swiftly as I realised that everyone who presented themselves for coaching was open to the process of what would unfold. I quickly realised that the expanded and receptive consciousness (Dängeli, 2015) brought through OA was accessible to all the clients I worked with, regardless of their backgrounds.

LT, MA and AK had never consciously meditated before our sessions together. LT shared that she had never even taken conscious deep breaths before! And for these three women, using guided meditations and conscious breathwork to access OA was profound. There were distinct shifts in their body language, tone and energy, bringing them all fully into the space and allowing them to open up. LT shared that “*the meditation (a new experience for me!) was calming, grounding and effective*” and MA has now incorporated a daily meditation practice because of the effect it had on her in sessions.

I also came to understand that OA can be accessed in different ways by different people. With MA and DB, connecting to their passion and purpose for art helped to establish OA through drawing visual representations of their thoughts and feelings on their pressing issue; for VB, a few conscious deep breaths. For BE and DLB, longer guided meditations with breathwork and visualisation were powerful, as well as the use of creative writing and journaling prompts. But all in all, every single person was able to enter Open Awareness, where it was used as a tool for meditative insight and growth (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2019).

3. The body truly knows the score

Van der Kolk (2015) writes, “Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past” and this became quite evident with clients who I could see were physically storing emotional pain/stress in their bodies. With these clients, I often used Soma-Centred Open Awareness meditations to enable them to fully connect with their physical selves. I would then guide them through a full body scan meditation, connecting to every part of the body and observing any physical sensations, along with messages or insights that arose.

Every client reported a message from the body in at least one session, which they were inspired to take action on. One standout experience was with AK in our second session where the full body scan in OA brought up so much for her: her head, her heart, her gut, her hips, her legs and her feet all had insights to share. She was deeply moved by this experience and reported that “*the meditation felt like I was cleansing or emptying myself*” and “*my body felt lighter*”.

I have found that checking in with the body is of vital importance. Furthermore, when we are able to connect physical sensations to psychological events (which very much happened in these sessions), then we can begin to slowly reconnect with ourselves (Van der Kolk, 2015).

4. Change and transformation are within reach if we take the time to go within

Each client reported noticeable changes in their lives which they attribute to their transpersonal coaching sessions and the insights gleaned from going within.

- LT landed herself a new job because of the work we did in a session
- DB returned to playing music after a long time away from it
- DLB reported, "...changes on all levels: physical, emotional, mental and energetic. The perspectives birthed through the insightful meditation created change in my inner worlds which reflected in the external"
- MA reported "feeling lighter and cleared-headed"
- BE shared that he was more connected to the present moment and the sessions had helped him confront and deal with his anger and resentment towards a past relationship
- AK said, "my body felt lighter"

For VB, a massive transformation occurred after our second session together where we worked with a blockage within her to do with singing around her partner. We went deeply within and using soma-centred OA, ASE methods and parts work were able to understand this blockage and work with it.

Together, using ASE 3-in-1 process (Dängeli, 2018), we travelled back in time to her 14-year-old self, which is where we discovered the point at which the blockage arose. By using parts work to understand the blockage more deeply and then providing comfort and support to her 14-year-old self, we travelled together through each of her ages from 14 to the present day, integrating her now healed past self to her present self and thus, clearing the blockage. She felt an immediate shift and said, "*it completely changed my life!*". Since that session VB has been singing with her partner everyday, as well as singing publicly (something she hadn't been able to do in 20 years).

Holding a safe, compassionate and healing space (Dängeli, 2023) for a client and giving them the opportunity to go within as you journey alongside them and facilitate the process, can lead to more rapid change, than them being left to deal with their issues without guidance. VB is a busy mum of two who in the last year hasn't had much time or space to be alone due to having a baby. By giving her this, in just *one* session we were able to reach incredible heights and she tells me, "*I am telling all of my friends that I had a life-changing experience!*".

5. Trauma can arise in the context of coaching

The final learning received through transpersonal coaching with seven clients from very different backgrounds is that as human beings, many of us have experienced some form of trauma in our lives and this is highly likely to arise in the context of coaching.

Levine (1997) writes: “People don’t need a definition of trauma; we need an experiential sense of how it feels”. He goes on to say that we can identify trauma by exploring our reactions to it; “that it has a feel that is unmistakable once it is identified” (Levine, 1997, p.26). I found that in entering the grey space with my clients where therapy and coaching intersect, with care, compassion and OA, the root causes of my clients’ issues quickly arose - evoking or triggering feelings that were unmistakable as trauma or deep-rooted wounds (Dängeli, 2023).

The act of choosing to acknowledge and see these wounds and pain helped many, if not all of my clients, to seek their inner wisdom for insights to move forward with. Transpersonal coaching helped my clients to “address profound crises by acknowledging their reality, considering their meaning for the client and facilitating their integration into everyday life” (Miskelly, 2023, as cited in Dängeli, 2023). For some, this meant the addition of a meditation practice into daily life, for others it was returning to creative outlets.

Conclusion

Transpersonal coaching is a truly unique form of coaching, where the word ‘coaching’ cannot encapsulate all that it is. For me, it is a way of coming to know, accept and love the complete human being; a way of accessing the wisdom of the soul in living the human experience to our greatest potential.

These five learnings gained through working with very different clients, serve as a reminder that there is far more that unites us in our human experience than divides us. By using Transpersonal Coaching to reconnect our inner worlds to our external worlds, we can actually connect to the oneness that unites everything, allowing us to live our individual and collective human experiences in ways that benefit us all.

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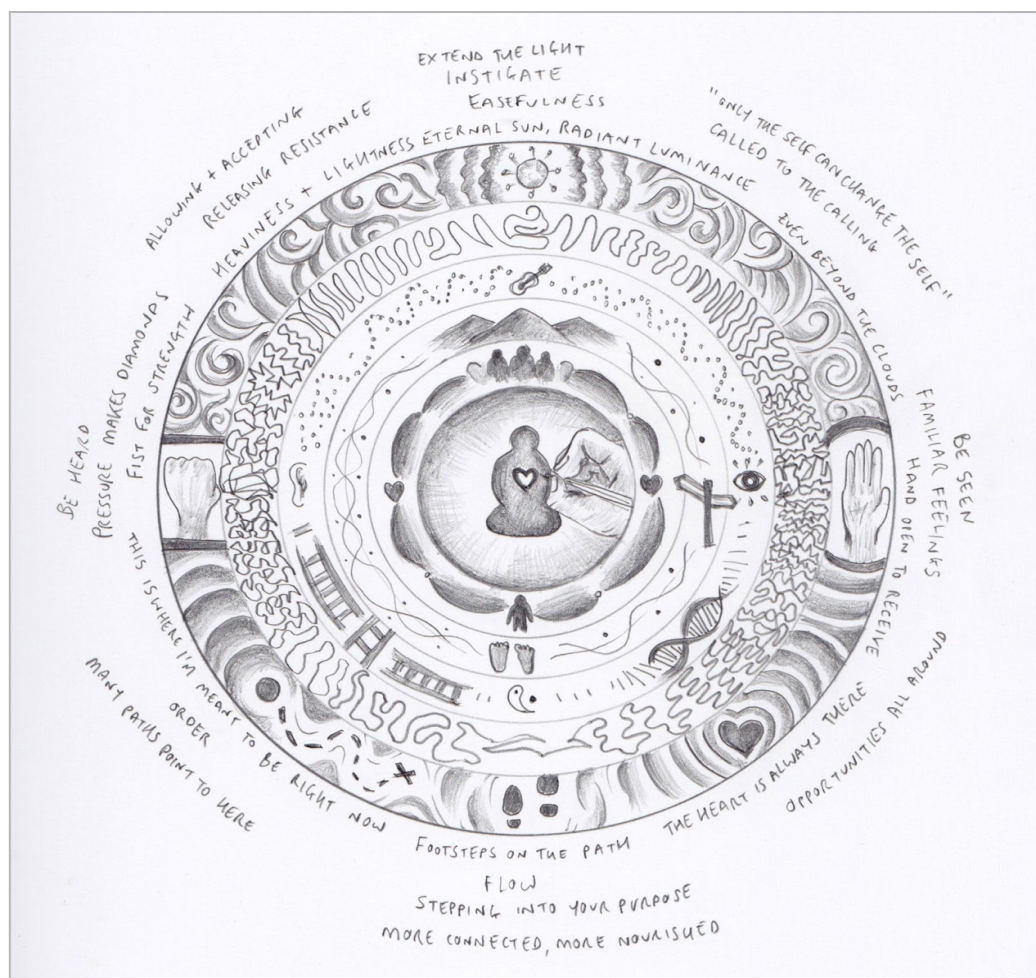
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Appendix: Integration Mandala Creation

This was a mandala drawing created by DB in our final session together, bringing together all of his key insights over our six sessions together into a visual image. I share this to demonstrate the power of transpersonal coaching and the beauty of connecting to our inner wisdom. This drawing depicts the beautiful insights and messages it can bring forth.



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Towards a nature-connected transpersonal psychology coaching model

Sheryl Clowes, BSc

Abstract

What is the value of a transpersonal nature-based coaching model? Does this further facilitate Open Awareness (Dängeli, 2019) and a cultivation of an ecological self? To what extent does this model further promote the naturally ecological transpersonal psychology coaching ethos? In this case study, the author examines the potential of a nature-based transpersonal model, focusing on the value this approach offers for promoting the growth of an ecological self, ecological coaching outcomes and further facilitating states of Open Awareness.

Keywords: transpersonal psychology, coaching, open awareness, authentic self empowerment, ecotherapy, nature, ecological self, nature coaching

Introduction

“You didn’t come into this world. You came out of it, like a wave from the ocean. You are not a stranger here”
— Alan Watts

‘Ecological self’, a term coined by deep ecologist Arne Naess, is an experience of self which identifies with others (humans and the more-than-human world) and the whole biosphere (Naess, 1984). The transpersonal ecopsychology perspective of the human-nature relationship holds the view that goes beyond the ego-based separate self, “nature and human are expressions of the same ground of being” (Davis, 2011). This transpersonal sense of interconnectedness naturally activates personal involvement with the world. It can serve as a basis for promoting environmentally responsible behaviour, ecological consciousness (Harrild & Luke, 2020) and a deepening of our evolutionary and reciprocal bond with nature. When ecological consciousness and an ecological self is fostered using the transpersonal coaching approach, clients naturally generate ecological outcomes, these being “good for you – good for others – good for the environment” (“win-win-win”) (Dängeli, 2022, p. 28). This distinctly moves away from the typical ego-logical coaching model which does not consider

the ecological impact of our coaching goals or promote clients to include both themselves and nature in the coaching process.

The transpersonal coaching tool of applied Open Awareness (OA) is a mindfulness-based approach that promotes a relaxed, responsive, and resourceful state that facilitates broader perspectives, an awareness of sensory perceptions, empathic connection, and interconnection with everything in nature (Dängeli, 2019). Exercises in nature have been cited to facilitate peak experiences and exalted state of consciousness that affords new insights of both oneself and the world (Naor et al., 2020) leading to long lasting transformative changes in the structures of one's identity, emotions, and self-image (Naor et al., 2020). Nature-based coaching is a systemic coaching modality where the client, coach, and nature co-create the coaching experience, so nature therefore becomes the co-coach. There is emerging evidence that supports how nature-based coaching promotes a client's dialogue with their inner nature, through the connection with the natural elements around them. This modality of coaching enhances feelings of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), and fosters transpersonal perspectives that are not readily available in a traditional coaching experience for a client (Roberts, 2022). My long-standing communion with nature, and belief/curiosity in the possibilities of OA and nature working together, fostered my interest in exploring the value of nature-based coaching and inspired me to create a nature-based transpersonal coaching model which I will now detail.

Method

All clients consented for the evaluation of our sessions together to be used in this report. To allow a more in-depth study of a nature-based transpersonal coaching model, I will focus on the outcomes of working with one of the clients (Client 1) who I coached for six 90-minute sessions. All sessions were conducted virtually via Zoom and headset headphones were used to feel deeper presence and embodied connection. To support the inquiry for this case study, prompts for reflection were given to Client 1 prior to embarking on the coaching process and at the end of the coaching process (see Appendix A). Mindful of the central importance the in-between session tasks would bear on the coaching process, Client 1 was made aware that she would be encouraged to go into nature to do a nature-based task and make time to explore a nature-based OA each week to which she consented. Each coaching session took a similar format each week, typically consisting of nine steps (see below for a detailed outline).

The nature-based transpersonal model:

1. **Brief check-in:** Welcoming the client and setting the intention for the coaching session.
2. **Grounding OA:** This was a 5 minute 'grounding' meditation, paying particular attention to connection to Earth through the soles of the feet and the senses.

3. **Reflection on nature tasks:** Here, to assist moving into the coaching conversation, photographs of the ecotherapy exercises the client had done in nature prior to the session were brought into the space via screen share to invite nature in physically, as a co-coach. This allowed for nature to be a central part of the dialogue of discovery from the start of the session.
4. **Revisiting ecological goals/desired outcomes and setting intention for the session:** Developing ecological goals remained a central part of the process with each session reconnecting to the overarching ecological desired outcome of the client. At the start of the session, we spent time tuning to their vision and how our session would help cultivate this further.
5. **OA and nature practices:** Here aspects of nature the client had been working with and OA practices were combined with nature-based imagery and the messages/insights that had come from nature in the pre-session task. These unique OA practices prompted further areas of exploration/enquiry.
6. **Reflection on the exercise and coaching conversation:** This was facilitated through the careful use of questions from transpersonal coaching and also nature-based coaching reflections to support the client to make connections and receive guidance from nature in relationship to their issue.
7. **ASE (Authentic Self Empowerment) practice:** ASE supports a client's alignment with their true purpose, fosters insight, clarity, presence and expansion of awareness, (Dängeli, 2018). Aspects of nature appropriate for the client were again interwoven into the ASE practices to foster nature's ability to co-coach the client and invoke further insights that wanted to emerge.
8. **Setting nature/OA tasks for the week ahead that connect to ecological goals/desired outcomes:** Here the client's ecological goals were revisited and an in between OA nature-based session task that would further develop the client's desired outcome was set. Each week, an OA nature meditation practice was also recorded and sent to the client to further support them in between coaching sessions to deepen insights connected to their issue.
9. **OA soma awareness to finish, incorporating giving gratitude to nature:** To finish the session, a short three minute grounding with a few moments to give gratitude to nature as a co-coach was introduced.

Working organically and intuitively with the client in their process, this method was not prescriptive and deviations from this naturally emerged week to week for each client.

Results

Prior to our first session together, Client 1 reported that she had felt most “at home” in nature in the forests and woodlands. However, due to being a wheelchair user now, she felt limited in her ability to access this and had become afraid of nature, “somehow, I feel that there is a ‘fear’ of being in nature now, what if I get stuck? What if I can’t get out?” Her sense of ecological self at the start of our coaching journey on a scale of 0-10, (10 representing a complete connection to her ecological self), was rated 4/10. She reflected, “my interconnectedness has become tenuous and diluted which feels very sad.” Client 1’s desired (ecological) goal was to change her relationship with food and to regain her lost connection to nature. Due to Client 1’s fear and uncertainty of being in nature, I felt very aware as a coach, the importance of grading nature tasks to support her to gradually gain confidence in the nature activities and remaining mindful of working at her pace, listening for the level of readiness of the client.

In the second session we moved into *Parts Integration*, as demonstrated by Dängeli (2012, <https://jevonDängeli.com/video-13-nlp-parts-integration>) to explore the two ‘parts’ of her that were ‘for’ and ‘against’ her recovery from her relationship with food. Here, a subpersonality, The *Self-Saboteur* and her highest potential, named *The Lotus*, emerged. We entered dialogue work to discover what these parts needed and the positive intentions of both. It was clear from the client’s insights that the qualities she wanted to cultivate - surrender, acceptance, and self-compassion - were severely lacking in her life presently. The function of her eating behaviour, “to protect [me] from pain, to keep [me] small, to stop [me] from feeling” was reducing her ability to connect to her highest potential (The Lotus), disconnecting her from both inner and outer nature. To support this further, an in-between session task was set to do an OA exercise before engaging in ‘a wounded place in nature’ ecotherapy practice. This is where the client found a wounded part of nature (for example, a plant, tree, animal or piece of land that is abandoned, injured or wounded in some way) and explored how this wound corresponded to elements of her own life. Prompts were provided to support reflection and emotional connection to this wounded place’s history and to guide her to uncover what strength she gained from this wound. This was represented symbolically with an object from nature which was brought to the next session to support the coaching process.

For this homework exercise, Client 1 found a plant in her back garden that had perished but was still fighting for life. She reflected, although half-dead, “seeing green shoots coming through again after all these years of nothingness” felt like a symbol of her own hope. The strength she received from the wound was noticing her own strength/ability to live with her pain differently and openness to possibility “anything given the right conditions can change...and yet, I somehow feel I will need a connection to something bigger than myself to support me with this”. Her symbol was a slate which for her represented inner balance and harmony, qualities she wanted to connect to and cultivate further. This exercise, invited many significant responses that emerged metaphorically through coaching with nature. I was curious what may unfold as Client 1 tuned into this “something bigger” (perhaps

transpersonal) experience in our coaching journey and how we would further cultivate her desired states that emerged from this work in ASE work in subsequent weeks.

Further work using the *ASE Past Re-Sourcing* method (Dängeli, 2018), *ASE Shadow Work* (Dängeli, 2018) and *The Web of Life* (Firman, 1996), promoted Client 1 to make insightful connections around her early childhood and relationship to food. This work awakened an important self-realisation for the client that the pain of the Earth and her own pain were experienced as one. Refraining from over-eating she reported, “could be beneficial not just to myself but to the planet. I had never thought of it this way...” This self-realisation intuitively unearthed a deeper motivation/will for the client to work with her food addiction as she connected to her ecological consciousness, her deepest values, and a renewed desire to support the ecosystem.

Ready to venture further afield in week 5, Client 1 chose to return to a woodland to which she hadn’t been in years, accompanied by a friend. Here she listened to a condensed 5-minute OA Jumi Tree and then explored the ‘investigating a tree’ exercise (see Appendix B) where she was invited to dialogue with a tree of her choice in open awareness. Client 1 reported that she received many messages from the exercise from what she felt was her Higher Self, which reflected to her to “only take what you need from the environment”, to “restore the harmony of nature” and “sense your inner flexibility.” I was again struck by how combining nature and OA exercises had become a vehicle for inner listening and as a vehicle for intuitive guidance. Her ecological desires which emerged from this exercise became a significant source of motivation for her behaviour change in subsequent weeks and marked an important part of her coaching journey.

Using the *ASE Future Re-Sourcing* method (Dängeli, 2018) with the *Breathing Like a Tree* exercise (Firman, 1996), the Client was guided, through OA, to connect to the perspective of her future self whilst also, tuning into the energy of the poplar tree, sensing the interdependence between them. In this process, Client 1 was able to connect with the intuition of her Higher Self. Client 1 reported that her “consciousness expanded to merge with the poplar tree ... I was no longer [client’s name] but at one with all nature and connected to the Cosmos”, illuminating how blending nature and ASE practices assisted her to find a “transpersonal identification with all of reality unlimited by time and space” (Hoot & Friedman, 2010). Through this further enquiry into her future self, a striking image of an older woman holding poplar tree leaves marked a significant moment of illumination for the client. She felt particularly struck by how she was drawn to this aspect of nature the previous week and the synchronicity of this and wondered if the “pull” she felt for the tree was her future self calling out to her. Client 1 reported that she hadn’t realised how much she had a desire for discovering her *Higher Self* to help her with her food addiction and that accessing her Higher Self qualities of flexibility, compassion and fearlessness, qualities that she had previously been unaware of, were serving her going forward with her eating issue. It was illuminating that this work appeared to significantly foster the client’s connection to her Higher Self. Client 1’s realisations reminded me of Stanislov Grof’s proposal surrounding

addiction, that a craving is a craving for transcendence or wholeness...a craving for the Higher Self (Grof, 1985). What Grof suggests here is that uncovering one's higher power (such as in this ASE and nature connection exercise), holds significant potential to promote healing and resolve issues connected to addiction/cravings. I was curious how further work on Higher Self both within the coaching journey and beyond through ongoing transpersonal practice such as the *Integral Life Practice*, a holistic set of practices which promote awareness, transformation and access to one's higher potential (Wilber et al., 2008), would further empower her to develop further transpersonal insights and tools to promote ongoing change in her relationship to food and her wellbeing as a whole.

Discussion

In the final session, we explored what had been most useful to Client 1 during the transpersonal nature-based coaching process. Here she reported that she had discovered a renewed confidence and joy to be in nature, that partnering with nature as a co-coach supported her to feel more "connected with [my] inner mind and outer body." Exercises connecting to her higher future self were seen to be instrumental for changing her relationship to food and supporting ecological ways of thinking. She reflected, "I now see food as nourishment rather than comfort...I feel much more aware of what [I] want to put in my body and how much of it." Client 1 also felt she had developed a transpersonal and reciprocal relationship with nature through the coaching process, "I am aware how I have received guidance from a source beyond my ego. Connecting with nature in OA, it felt as if my awareness expanded, and I was able to listen more intuitively to the messages from nature." Reflecting on her sense of her ecological consciousness and ecological self, Client 1 reported that now at the close of the coaching journey, she felt this had significantly increased and rated this at 8/10 (10 representing a complete connection to her ecological self). This is a striking contrast to the initial self-rating of 4/10 at the start of coaching. Client 1 anticipated that she felt this would continue to grow over the coming months as she has now discovered her confidence to be out in the wild through the graded approach that we took together and was keen to revisit and regularly practise all the recordings and practices explored during the coaching process.

Conclusion

Over the past three months, I have witnessed how a nature-based transpersonal coaching model has promoted clients to develop their ecological self and consciousness, allowing them to receive guidance from the more-than-human world, cultivate a deeper listening to their inner voice/intuition and experience unparalleled self-discovery through the metaphors and symbols nature offered. OA was also seen to be enhanced through nature-based practices, with themes including expansiveness, interconnection and transpersonal states emerging across every coaching process. The ecological goals of a transpersonal coaching model have also seen to be an integral part of the work. Clients have felt a deeper understanding and connection to how their own process can nourish both self and nature, and the extended

benefits of this. The bespoke nature-based OA recordings provided for each client were also seen to be very supportive as they allowed the clients to revisit and continue to practise, guided nature-based coaching practices in between sessions. They were a valuable tool to continue to foster their nature connection beyond the coaching journey.

Each coaching journey has deeply touched me in my own relationship to nature. As humanity faces the onset of likely environmental crises, an increased understanding of how people might experience a greater interconnectedness, such as through a nature-based transpersonal coaching model, could provide an important avenue on not only personal levels but also for the very survival of Earth. I propose that working with nature as a co-coach within the nature-based transpersonal coaching model significantly assists clients to not only cultivate ecological coaching outcomes that are good for both client and nature, but promotes an integration of different ways of accessing transpersonal knowing (Rowe, 2013).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questions provided to clients for this case study at the start of their coaching journey

- How interconnected do you feel you are to your ecological self (a sense of deep interconnectedness to nature and capacity to identify with a sense of self which includes all life-forms, ecosystems, and the Earth) as we begin coaching?
- Where do you feel “at home” in nature (if at all?)

Questions at the end at the end of their coaching journey

- How interconnected do you feel to your ecological self (a sense of deep interconnectedness and being part of nature) as we close our coaching?
- What has nature offered you that feels important/relevant to your issue(s)/challenge(s)?
- Do you feel that working with nature has facilitated the development of a sense of open awareness? (feelings of expansiveness, a bigger picture, an intentional observation of thoughts, feelings, and sensory perceptions, interconnectedness).
- Going forward, do you see yourself continuing to engage with nature as a co-coach for self-enquiry?
- Do you feel working with a transpersonal perspective has been helpful for you? If so, why?

Appendix B: Example ecotherapy and nature-based homework exercises done in nature

Investigating a tree exercise

Stand in front of a tree or as closely as you can but enough to see it in its entirety. Ground yourself looking at the tree as you do so. Notice how the tree is rooted in the ground. Feel your feet connecting with the earth and imagine that you have roots going down into the ground, just as the tree has. Feel yourself breathing in its stability. Notice how the branches stand stretching upwards and outwards. Feel your body expanding to occupy its space. Notice the air circulating between the branches and feel it entering your lungs. Feel the spaciousness within your body.

Now, reach out and touch the trunk of the tree at first with your eyes open and then with your eyes closed. Feel the texture of bark and the shape of the wood beneath it. Notice irregularities and projections, observing how the bark changes colour and texture higher up the trunk. Notice any scars on the tree. See what you can discover of the tree's history from the marks on its bark.

Having finished, close your eyes again and place your hands on the bark, connecting with it as a living organism. Sense its history, feel its presence. Now step back and look at the whole tree. Watch it, notice any movements of the branches. How much wind is needed to make them sway? How flexible is it? If you can, reach a branch and test how easily different size twigs bend. Listen to the leaves. The branches. Put your ear to them and listen in. Feel them with your hands, your face, your body, your limbs. Look for signs of the tree's seasonal cycle. If it's deciduous, which point is it at? Are there any new buds, summer foliage, or tinges of autumn colour? What has already been and what is to come?

If it is an evergreen, look for signs of growth and decay. Notice what lives on your tree. Insects, plants, animals, birds, Moss. Make a note of this. What can you identify? Where do the different creatures live? What do they eat? Do they cause the tree harm or benefit? Notice if you want to ask your tree a question and offer this now... Listen.

What message and wisdom does the tree offer you? How can you invite some of the tree's wisdom in your heart/body/mind? Make any observations that have come to you as you did this exercise...How have you met this tree? How have you encountered it? What emerged for you in that experience?

Journal your reflections and bring these to our next session.

Author: Sheryl Clowes

Sheryl Clowes is the Wellbeing Support Lead for Alef Trust, an occupational therapist working in mental health, mindfulness facilitator and a certified transpersonal coach. Sheryl is passionate about the transformative potential of transpersonal and integrative nature-based coaching and has undertaken training in wilderness therapy, ecotherapy and nature connected coaching. As a trained Acceptance and Commitment Therapy practitioner/coach, a psychotherapeutic approach that uses the principles of mindfulness and acceptance to develop emotional resilience and psychological flexibility, Sheryl is also committed/interested in empowering individuals to make positive behaviour changes to their lives, supporting them to move towards living a rich and meaningful life that is congruent with their values. Sheryl is currently training as an Ecosensory therapy Practitioner. Ecosensory therapy is rooted in the sensory modulation, ecotherapy, psychology and Shinrin Yoku (forest bathing). Learn more or contact Sheryl at : OTnaturecoach@gmail.com Facebook page: @coachingwithnature

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Imagery as a support within the Open Awareness coaching process

Mark Cantwell, MSc

Abstract

This report reviews the transpersonal coaching processes and the outcomes they generated for two clients, over the course of five coaching sessions. The author analyses the role of Open Awareness techniques in coaching, including Soma Centred Open Awareness and the Jumi Tree Breathing Technique, accompanied by active imagination and emerging imagery within coaching sessions. Both the imagery and its supportive role in the application of Open Awareness are discussed in terms of assisting the client to progress through the transpersonal coaching process.

Keywords: transpersonal, coaching, open awareness, active imagination, imagery

Introduction

The objective of this report is to explore the application of Open Awareness (OA) (Dängeli, 2019) techniques and processes in conjunction with the natural emergence of imagery in the context of transpersonal coaching. The author (coach) will analyse the mechanism by which imagery emerged and evolved for clients, how this served as a means to self-navigate the experience of OA, and how this benefitted the coaching process.

In Transpersonal Coaching Psychology (TCP), emphasis is placed on co-creating a responsive setting with the client, anchored in the present, which is the nature of Soma Centred OA - described in the Methodology section of this report. The coach also utilises OA as a means to effectively hold a safe and potentially transformative space for the client during sessions. This high-level quality of holding space is a cornerstone of TCP. Holding space in this manner is often more valuable than the application of other coaching or therapy techniques, as noted by many good practitioners (Slochower, 2013; Kelemen et al., 2018; Bevan, 2021). Soma Centred OA frequently uses guided breathwork and a stepped incremental expansion of perceptual awareness, to relax and diffuse the effects of triggering experiences. It affords a mindful introspection of any emotional attachments, bringing the

client to a relaxed, responsive, and resourceful state of awareness within a safe and held coaching space.

The Soma Centred OA approach also offers the opportunity for clients to explore past sources of triggers and issues, backtracking to identify and view those past sources from a safe distance/perspective. With somatic awareness anchored in the ‘here and now’, the client can, if helpful, come to know the ‘there and then’ sources of their presenting issues and how these issues operate in the present. The client can also explore new potential understandings and meanings that might bring forth an opportunity of change in perception and response in relation to the issue’s triggers in the future. Each position in time is explored by the client from the OA viewpoint, a somatic, metacognitive, holistic, and disidentified viewpoint.

Active imagination and imagery produced within an OA held space offers safe access to explore and defuse the effect of triggers. Active imagination is described as, “Jung’s term for a process in which, while consciousness looks on, participating but not directing, co-operating but not choosing, the unconscious is allowed to speak whatever and however it likes” (Whitehouse 1999, p.83). Being inherently expansive and interconnected, the state of OA assists the coach and client to engage with the process of active imagination (Jung, 1960). Imagery is a product of the active imagination process and is a different phenomenon to perception (Thomas, 2014). The emergence of imagery from the unconscious mind often leads to other imagery. Imagery produced can be used to empower the client to explore, for example, meaning and clarity around experiences and triggers within the coaching process. Imagery and active imagination offer the potential of co-creating a common lexicon and navigation waypoints within the coaching process. “The ego’s direct engagement with imagery thus represents one of the most essential features of this alchemical healing process,” (Davis, 2019, p.3).

Open Awareness (OA) within Transpersonal Coaching Psychology (TCP)

Why employ a TCP approach to coaching? TCP augments absent aspects of other coaching approaches (Ho Law et al., 2010), such as the Goal, Reality, Obstacles, Options, Way Forward (GROW) Model (Whitmore, 2017). TCP explores more deeply within the client’s consciousness and unconsciousness, producing a more holistic self-work process and set of outcomes.

With applied OA at its core, TCP facilitates the defusing of self-limiting perceptions and negative beliefs, identified as “tunnel awareness” by Dängeli (2019). With its inherent focus on what is wrong or dangerous in a situation, tunnel awareness is limited to survival and protective mechanisms such as the fight, flight and freeze responses (Porges, n.d; Dana, 2020). As such, in the state of tunnel awareness, one is cut off from creativity, thinking and ecological or holistic perception. TCP as a model and approach “... emphasises the way in

which we can overcome our habitual self-limiting belief[s]” through integrating OA (Law & Lancaster, 2010, p.35).

Method

Two pro bono clients’ transpersonal coaching experiences are reviewed below, where emerging and evolving imagery during the OA experience supported the coaching process. The clients underwent at least five coaching sessions between July 2022 and January 2023. Ethical approval was received prior to coaching commencement and each of the clients’ identities were anonymized.

The coaching process began with an initial needs assessment of the client’s physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization values and beliefs; utilising Dängeli’s Needs and Values Elicitation Form (Dängeli, 2018). This form was also used to establish the client’s goals on five levels: physical, mental, emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual. This needs and values assessment aims to elicit the client’s desired outcomes for the coaching process as a whole, although these may alter as the process progresses.

Using an OA approach, the Transpersonal Coaching Model (TCM) (Dängeli, 2018) was followed with both clients. The TCM incorporates seven interconnected domains in which we experience our embodied reality, comprising the Body (physical health and performance); Mind (mental health and performance); Emotion (motivations and reactions); Shadow (unconscious aspects of the personality); Connection (relationships and inter-relatedness); Soul (subtle essence of individuals and groups); Spirit (causal and non-dual realms). The perception of self is explored across self-beliefs, values, capabilities, and possible actions which may be taken to make a desired holistic and lasting change. Ten aspects are explored within the TCM; the presenting state, trigger, behaviours, identities, beliefs, values, purpose, vision, mission, and source.

The TCM framework enables clients to explore their own holistic map of self, and to potentially move towards self-transcendence (Maslow, 1971) in relation to the challenges or issues presented. Clients are supported and empowered to explore beyond the self-perceptual confines of the “I”. This approach aims to facilitate a spiritual (internal) and environmental (external) exploration of presenting issues. This is a key differentiating factor between TCP and other coaching approaches.

Coaching sessions were client centred, while the coach facilitated the development of OA. The OA processes utilised included the Soma Centred OA exercise (Dängeli, 2019). Soma Centred OA brings awareness to internal perception of breathing with the body. It leads clients to an expansion of perception. Perception is expanded by bringing awareness to just outside the body and expansion of awareness to space increasingly distant from the body to an ultimate point where that perception needs to expand. The aim is to expand the client’s map of reality/self. Perception and awareness will only extend to what is meaningful and

helpful for the client. Following expansion, the client's awareness is then guided back into the internal space of the body. Any experiences such as imagery arising are explored with the client. Where, for example, stress was impeding the Soma Centred OA, the Jumi Tree Breathing Technique (JTBT) (Dängeli, 2019) was used to diffuse that stress. JTBT uses the imagery of a tree expanding in all directions via its sensing roots, trunk, and branches. This was combined in a supportive process with the Soma Centred OA process.

Results

Each of the clients reported feeling relaxed and an absence of the grip which their triggers had previously held for them prior to the coaching sessions. Additionally, they discovered resolution possibilities for the underlying issues impinging on their wellbeing. To protect the identities of the clients discussed below, the pseudonyms Brigid and Danu are used.

Client: Brigid

Brigid initially presented issues of confidence and anxiety while undertaking activities. These included walking, sports and driving. The presenting issues evolved over the coaching sessions, to also include issues concerning her work and career. The approach used comprised a blend of a Soma Centred OA exercise and JTBT to expand awareness, bringing attention to the experience from a disidentified point of perception. This enabled her to establish a non-attached, yet engaged witnessing perspective in the context of the issues.

During OA, the initiating trigger was revealed to be a confidence-impacting experience following a severe sporting accident two years earlier. The imagery that emerged for Brigid involved a tiger, out of its natural environment, in a zoo and tethered to a cage. Possible meanings attaching to the tiger and tether imagery was explored in successive sessions - exploring purpose and values. Brigid's experience of the triggering issue and imagery evolved over the coaching sessions. She identified a new organisational work role and was concerned about the role's impact on her current role. To further diffuse attachment of the initial triggering event, it was agreed that Brigid re-energize her yoga and mindfulness practices between sessions. The effect of diffusing her anxiety in the context of the trigger was explored in subsequent sessions.

During the coaching process, the tether imagery was reported as morphing into a leading rope or tether used by mountain climbing pathfinders. The possibility emerged for Brigid to explore a pathfinding role and a new way to be of service to others within her organisation. She committed to explore with her manager areas of responsibility and interest from within the proposed new role. In her coaching session some weeks later, Brigid reported receiving unsolicited positive feedback from several workgroup meetings, noting that her presence was facilitating a new positive energy for each of the workgroups, some of which were new and unfamiliar project groups. This may also represent a multiplying/rippling effect of embodied OA beyond the client.

In her final session, Brigid reported feeling more relaxed about her work aspirations, as well as confident in the direction and the pace of progression towards her ultimate career aspiration - identified as a private practice in psychotherapy. She also reported being more confident in her driving capability, which had previously been a major issue for her. Brigid gratefully acknowledged the impressive progress that she had made through the coaching process, closing with a self-appreciation exercise and a celebration of her accomplishments.

Client: Danu

Danu described an absence of parental care, nurture, or guidance from early childhood into adolescence which had forced her to step into a parental role for her siblings. This role evolved over time to serve her well in her work and career. However, this existed mainly within structured and resourced organisational environments. Danu reported finding that this expectation of leadership and parenting had evolved into triggers concerning boundaries. Having recently exited a structured organisational environment and a career in senior leadership, she described a range of boundary issues emerging once again including “people pleasing” and “stepping in”, which were hampering her own wellbeing and goals. These presented as issues of disorganisation in completing tasks and a writing project which she was excited to undertake.

In her Soma Centred OA process, Danu described imagery involving snakes attached to her head. She identified their meaning as having too many tasks and being a people pleaser without effective boundaries which felt inimical. During another coaching session, Danu continued to describe imagery of her childhood as a parental role, within a dysfunctional family environment. The current trigger identified by Danu was a constant felt stimulus to “step in” to ensure others (siblings) needs were met. Discussing the possibilities for improving her self-organisation and support of her holistic wellbeing needs and goals, Danu agreed to address a lapse of her meditation and Tai Chi practices, and she committed to setting healthy boundaries. Danu also came up with the idea to set up a “social day” each week, leaving time for friends and family. During her final coaching session, Danu described an image of decapitated snake heads, reporting that this was the result of her placing appropriate boundaries, supported by her renewed commitment to her daily practice of holistic self-nurture.

Discussion

Methods to access and embody the state of OA, such as Soma Centred OA exercises and JTBT techniques, enabled clients to relax, become less identified with their triggering issues, and more receptive to the potential emergence of helpful imagery during coaching sessions. The combination of OA and working with the client’s imagery that arose spontaneously during the sessions helped to diffuse the effect of the issue triggers and enabled these clients to embody a new and more resourceful response in those triggering situations. Imagery also assisted in tracking the movement and progress across the coaching sessions.

During the OA process, the clients led their exploration and reflections, whilst I held space for their process to unfold and evolve naturally. Coaching discussions did not proceed linearly through the sessions, but by the end of a session or across sessions, each of the steps in the TCM framework had been addressed. Imagery emerging from the transpersonal coaching process enabled a common communication lexicon underpinning the process, client progress and assisting in building coaching collaboration or alliance (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993; Krupnick et al., 2006).

Davis (2019) posits that active imagination can also be understood as an expanded and restorative state of perception or consciousness. During OA, active imagination supports exploration of the elements within TCM, finding their essential meaning to reveal empowering possibilities for sustained transformation. Finally, active imagination which may emerge and evolve during the transpersonal coaching process can be described as a psychospiritual experience of connection by the client with their authentic self. “This is the beginning of the transcendent function” (Jung et al., 2014, p.82).

My own insights and development arising from the practice of OA in coaching sessions, included the discovery of an authentic coaching voice, competency in holding the OA space for clients and in exploring additional ways to build and maintain coaching communication and collaboration.

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A phenomenological exploration of transpersonal life coaching: a co-created playful dance of imagery and metaphor

Christine Simmonds-Moore, PhD

Abstract

A series of transpersonal coaching sessions were analysed using thematic analysis with a phenomenological lens. Three emergent themes were identified, and these included: playfulness, intuition, and letting go; the power of holding the intentional co-created space; and imagery, metaphor and dynamic shifts of self. Results suggest that a successful session reflects a collaborative space infused with a sense of playfulness and that there is a pivotal role for imagery in transpersonal coaching.

Keywords: empathy, playfulness, imagery, symbols, transformation

Introduction

This paper sought to explore the phenomenology¹ of a series of transpersonal coaching sessions that were conducted between August of 2022 and January of 2023 as part of my certificate program in Transpersonal Life Coaching. Transpersonal psychology holds transformation at its core (Hartelius, 2022). As one application, transpersonal coaching has been touted as the 4th wave of psychological interventions capable of leveraging change (Law & Buckler, 2020). There are several contemporary transpersonal coaching models, which each share the goal of facilitating growth and transformation of the individual, society, and the environment (Law & Buckler, 2020). Coaching is conducted via the use of reflective questions used in tandem with the encouragement of transpersonal states of consciousness. This is done by entering into a shared intentional liminal space with the client via the use of the breath and meditation (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2018).

Coaching essentially moves a client from being too focused on the ego or sense of “I” to a more “expansive and interconnected sense of self” (Dängeli, 2023a, p. 1). Dängeli describes

¹ Phenomenological approaches to research reflect rich explorations and meaning making in the context of a given experience, essentially unpacking *what an experience is like* (e.g., Smith, 2015).

Tunnel Awareness (2022) as a state of mind and body that are narrow, linear, and aligned with restricted thought patterns including anxiety, stress, depression, and rumination (Dängeli, 2022). Open Awareness (OA) is described simply as the “flow of pure experience interconnected with the rest of reality” (Dängeli, 2019, p. 7) that allows for introspection, extropection, and enviropection². Others have noted that altered states allow for different ways of knowing to those possible in the waking states (Braud, 2011). Transpersonal coaching facilitates conscious access to the client’s values, purpose, and deeper meanings—somatic knowing that may usually be unconscious.

Transpersonal states can often include imagery that can serve as metaphors for psycho emotional content (Hartelius, 2022). Sometimes, Active Imagination processes may allow for external and tangible representations of transpersonal realities (Braud, 2011). This may contribute to the new (conscious) perspectives on the presenting issues. Transpersonal states (including OA) encourage changes in what becomes integrated into the overarching I-narrative, either by attenuation of the focus on the I or by encouraging more associations and visualisations in *how* the narrative is constructed (Law et al., 2010).

Hudson and Johnson (2021) observe that issues pertaining to past emotional events and traumatic experiences can be rekindled in the current time by triggers that bring aspects of the learned pathways into being. These can result in a range of mind-body symptoms that can manifest consciously and unconsciously. It is noteworthy that this type of stimulus-response patterning can be unlearned (Hudson & Johnson, 2021). The Transpersonal Coaching Model (TCM) (Dängeli, 2022) seeks to bring the unconscious pairing of trigger and response into conscious awareness and rewrite the response by experiencing the trigger from an elevated (transpersonal) perspective in which one is no longer in Tunnel Awareness.

Hudson and Johnson (2021) note two stages to what they term *split second unlearning*. In step 1, the client is made aware of their response via questioning while in step 2, there is an invitation to view the same problem differently (using a different gaze). This is incorporated in the “T model” (Dängeli, 2023b) which essentially encourages a re-writing of a client’s trigger anatomy³ via connecting to transpersonal states and the earth (terra) to encourage a different (sometimes bird’s eye) perspective on the presenting issue and trigger anatomy. Hudson and Johnson note that these states of *curiosity* facilitate the learning of new information and new responses to old triggers, without the need to examine the content of traumatic experiences.

Previous studies provide evidence that transpersonal coaching and OA can facilitate both a shift in perspective and the regulation of the emotions and the nervous system that led to

² Essentially, awareness of the whole self, the self in relation to social others and the self in relation to the environment and issues pertaining to the environment.

³ This includes clients’ physiological, behavioural, cognitive and interpretative responses to a traumatic trigger that are often visible in states of Tunnel Awareness. The T model incorporates different T’s as connection to the earth (terra) and transpersonal awareness to create new responses that are explored via playful encounters with the trigger in the future (trial).

greater resourcefulness and insights into clients' situations via perception of the self in new perspectives; as a reclamation of the self (Varmuza, 2022).

Method

This project explored the phenomenological nature of transpersonal coaching as informed by my experiences as coach and client.

Materials

A "Coaching Agreement Form, Alef Trust" (n.d) and a "Needs and Values Elicitation Form" (n.d) were sent to clients prior to the first session. Following the sessions, a feedback questionnaire was sent to clients via Qualtrics (Appendix A).

Participants

Participants included several peers who were fellow students on the Alef Trust's Transpersonal Coaching certificate Program (TCP, 2022-2023) and seven external clients, including three students engaged in other courses run by the Alef Trust, two referrals from peers, and two members of my local community, recruited via social media. See appendix B for descriptions of clients.

Procedure

Each session was scheduled for one hour and conducted via Zoom. External clients were sent a needs and values form such that they could articulate any issues that were consciously available to them (optional) and a coaching agreement form which they were asked to sign prior to the first session. For all but one external client, at least three sessions were scheduled.

Sessions were structured as follows; taking three resourceful breaths to allow for a transition into the present moment and to connect the person to their body and help them relax and connect with their issue. Clients were then asked about what was consciously presenting for them in terms of their state and the issue was explored superficially. I would then ask the client what they would like to achieve as a goal of the coaching session and that this could be something concrete, or an emotion or thought or image or question to ask the unconscious.

The goal was clarified, and the client was invited to participate in a meditation in which we would invite clarity on the issue. I would often use the word *play* and note that the body and unconscious mind can sometimes have insights into the issue that might be outside the conscious awareness of the client. I often facilitated a soma-centered⁴ open awareness as part of the TCM (Dängeli, 2022).

I would often use my intuition about *how* to apply the TCM and I would sometimes employ the T Model (Dängeli, 2023b) when I felt that clients needed to see their lives in a different way and gain a different perspective to move forward. I invited clients to provide verbal

⁴ An approach that focuses on facilitating a state of OA using the breath to elicit a state of embodied relaxation and encouraging connections between the embodied self and a wider reality.

feedback and sent clients an anonymous survey following the final session. I maintained a journal and kept extensive notes on each external client in addition to general notes on experiences with peers and my own experiences and feedback responses.

Results

Notes, reflections and feedback from clients were analysed for emergent themes using Thematic Analysis with a phenomenological lens.

Playfulness, intuition and letting go

Throughout my coaching experiences I have realised that I must give in and trust the process and that my intuition can often stimulate changes in the experiences of clients. This would often feel like entering into a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2018) in my sessions, which was noted by some clients. Playfulness is about letting go and being with the client and not being attached to outcomes (and time). Playfulness also seemed to allow greater access to the co-created space. This began with intention and empathy. Clients seemed to appreciate the invitation to playfully explore their issues and invite insights from their unconscious. The use of the term “play” sometimes helped clients to let go and led to insights that they realised they “already knew.”

The power of holding the intentional co-created space

This theme reflects the shared nature of the coaching experience, apparent in terms of shared imagery, shared somatic/energetic sensations, and in terms of the experienced shifts and power of the shared space. I observed several signs that the coach and client were sharing psychological and spiritual space that were experienced via the body and emotional and energetic phenomena.

Experiences of being in a *shared space* seemed to grow as I became more practised as a coach and more comfortable with the shared meditation. I would close my eyes and notice that I would experience signs including tingling sensations that arose in the scalp and neck area of my body. These experiences are akin to Autonomous Sensory Meridian response (ASMR), which tend to spread from the scalp and neck and shoulder areas of the body into other parts of the body and are associated with calm and positive mood states in addition to meditation and mindfulness (Glim et al., 2022). I sometimes felt this when the client experienced alchemical shifts in their perspective which felt like I was there *with* them. Several clients observed that this collaborative process was qualitatively different to insights obtained as a result of solo meditation and in more traditional modes of therapy. Sharing, verbalising and exploring imagery and insights together seemed to allow clients to understand their issues with new eyes.

Imagery, metaphor and dynamic shifts in self

Issues included relationship and communication issues; healing of past issues and life transitions including reclaiming identity following the birth of a child, navigating shifts in female identity associated with menopause, the death of a loved one, and career changes. The

role of imagery was at the heart of many insights and changes that occurred. Imagery could be visual, verbal, somatic, auditory, and multisensory. Imagery often seemed to re-represent issues and responses to issues from the unconscious that could then be unpacked, interpreted, and adjusted in the coaching sessions. Imagery would frequently shift during sessions and adjust in alignment with the issues and insights about the issues.

For example, one client experienced the embodied sense of repression of the authentic self as related to heaviness in the neck area (associated with speaking and being heard) and discomfort in the pelvic area which she associated with motherhood, which changed as we unpacked her issues. For one peer client, resentment and shame from the past was represented as a chest-based metal ball that had barbed wire on the outside that would move up into the throat and cause the client to cough. Ultimately, the metal ball in the chest shifted to the shape of a lemon which she had associated with freedom and moving away from fear, alongside a sense of integration of the old self and the new self. For others, imagery reflected childhood memories and insights that could be manipulated and integrated with the current self-identity. For others, insights were verbal realisations, such as a sense of “coming home”.

Imagery could sometimes be shared between the client and the coach. When this happened, it worked as an additional point of connection and concrete/tangible (but malleable) representation of the issue that allowed for transformation. Personal images, messages and symbols could also provide a tangible and concrete *take-home* to integrate in the person’s life beyond the coaching sessions, as a found object, verbal message, or image to remind the client of their insights.

Discussion

Coaching sessions were the most successful with playfulness and by giving in to intuitive ways of knowing that are best served by being in a place of connection. This was achieved via empathy, intention, and shared meditation, which allowed for access to OA. The idea of trust in the process and of playfulness is aligned with the insights of Getley (2022), who realised that “being present brings resourcefulness and a trust in life that it is happening for me not to me” (p. 20).

From the place of playfulness there was an emergent sense of flow that allowed shared imagery to manifest in the space between the client and the coach. The shared space that emerged reflects a deep empathic resonance between the coach and client that has been described by Dängeli and Geldenhuys (2018) as *sharing the liminal space*.

Imagery also played a pivotal role in the transformation of the sense of self. Transformations could often be observed in the form of intriguing changes in imagery that represented core issues for the client. Intriguingly, such transformation of aspects of the self could often occur within one session, but developed more deeply over a series of sessions. Imagery is also employed in some of the authentic self empowerment exercises (Dängeli, 2018). The changes in imagery and corresponding changes in insights that clients experienced can be understood as *synesthesia*-like shifts in metaphor-rich imagery. Synesthesia refers to having an additional

perceptual experience in response to certain stimuli (Van Leeuwen et al., 2015). It is noteworthy that this can also occur in mild altered states (Linton & Linton, 2015). The direct connections between images, shapes and meanings exhibit bidirectionality such that changes in the image are associated with changes in meaning and vice versa. This tangible co-created and shared imagery suggests something akin to Corbin's Active Imagination that was discussed previously by Braud (2011).

Conclusion

A successful session is a collaborative co-created connected space characterised by a sense of playfulness which allows for the ignition of a certain energy and aliveness that injects sessions with alchemy. Imagery often seems to reflect symbolic insights into the presenting issue and is therefore a deeply powerful tool in transpersonal coaching.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Feedback questionnaire

This survey invites you to respond to a few open ended questions about your recent experiences of transpersonal life coaching with Christine Simmonds-Moore. Your response is anonymous.

[general demographic questions including age and gender were included]

1. What is your overall impression of the coaching and the approach that your coach took?
2. What worked well – what was most meaningful to you, and/or what was your greatest insight, and/or what did you enjoy most about the coaching?

3. What impact did the sessions have on you – did you notice any changes (physical, emotional, mental, energetic, etc.) afterwards that shifted your perspective or your experience in relation to the issue?
4. What did you learn about yourself throughout/after the sessions? What were the main benefits of the sessions for you
5. Do you feel clear about what next steps you want to take towards the integration of your insights that you got throughout the sessions?
6. How was the structure of the sessions for you regarding the scheduling, amount of sessions, time-frames between sessions, time-length of the sessions, the pace/tempo that the coach used in the sessions, and the session setup, e.g., Zoom-setup, audio/picture quality etc.?
7. Is there anything that can be improved? Was there something missing? What would you have preferred?
8. How would you describe this type of coaching to a friend?
9. Do you have any additional comments or feedback?

Appendix B: External client descriptions and notes on sessions

Client 1

An American female navigating shifts in identity as her baby is maturing and working on meaningfully reclaiming her sense of authentic self and empowerment.

Client 2

A European male seeking balance between the different aspects of his life, meaningfully connecting with community and being able to access and nourish his creative potential.

Client 3

An American female whose issues include many shifts in her life, including the ending of a long-term relationship and transitioning into greater authenticity in her life, including embracing creativity and healing past traumas and tendencies toward codependency.

Client 4

An American female whose issues mostly pertain to management of living with the loss of a loved one, issues of control and needing to let go and accessing resourcefulness that provides grounding and meaning.

Client 5

A South American woman who is realising the need for change in terms of her emotional responses within her relationship.

Client 6

An Irish male whose issues focus on working on reclaiming his authentic creative and spiritual self.

Client 7

A British male entering a transitional time in his life, as he is about to leave his job. He is looking for inspiration in terms of the next steps in his life and to explore his fears and callings as he navigates these next steps.

Author: Christine Simmonds-Moore

Christine Simmonds-Moore is a UK native who is living in the USA with her US husband and two children. She is a Professor of Psychology at the University of West Georgia where she teaches classes on parapsychology, transpersonal psychology, and other topics pertinent to consciousness studies. She has research interests in parapsychology, exceptional experiences, psychological boundaries, paranormal beliefs and disbeliefs, mental health correlates of exceptional experiences, synesthesia, altered states of consciousness, healing and placebo effects. She has completed Alef Trust's Transpersonal Coaching Psychology Certificate Programme (2022-2023) and plans to use her skills to work with those with parapsychological experiences. Learn more or contact Christine at csimmond@westga.edu

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Transpersonal Coaching Psychology: Embracing the unknown and honouring emergent processes and allies through intuitive beingness

Eliza-Beth Brennan

Abstract

This report reflects the learning journey the author undertook as part of her training in stepping into the coach role with eight very diverse clients and how she was able to honour the coaching process by at first embracing the unknown. In trusting of the power of Open Awareness and the interconnected liminal space of the coaching container she was able to recognise, bring awareness to and welcome in allies in the form of; dreams, symbols, visions, archetypes, and metaphors which were in service to her client's unique emergent process. Insights into the dynamics of the coaching process are offered through shared client reflections and testimonials. In summarising the experience as coach, the author realises, that it was the capacity to be in a state of 'intuitive beingness' over any specific *doing* that resulted in the emergence of the wisdom ways of being and authentic action her clients were able to carry out of the sessions with them.

Keywords: transpersonal coaching, coaching allies, open awareness, intuitive beingness

Introduction

Transpersonal Coaching Psychology (TCP) is a holistic and integrative approach which supports client growth and potential transformation through an individually tailored process which is person centred (Dängeli, 2022). Transpersonal coaching supports a shift in orientation beyond the ego, leveraging expanded states of consciousness, and a dynamic liminal space (Dängeli, 2022; Law et al., 2010). The coach is supporting authentic alignment for the client which is holistic and honours the client's teleological drive for authentic action that aligns with their unique values, purpose and meaning.

The 'coaching container' which holds the liminal space of openness, receptivity and equanimity in the TCP model referred to here, is one which is facilitated through entering into a state of Open Awareness (OA) (Dängeli, 2022; Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2022). OA "can

be described as the flow of pure experience interconnected with the rest of reality” (Dängeli, 2019, p. 7). This expanded, creative, connected, liminal space provides an opportunity for both the conscious and emergent processes and allies to be welcomed and worked with. Here the term “ally” is aligned to the definition used in process work; they are the givers of secrets and can help one find one’s voice (Mindell & Mindell, 2020). The allies or ‘givers of secrets’ utilised in the coaching sessions explored in this paper include dreams, symbols, visions, archetypes, and metaphors. This style of working draws on what Mindell (1995, p. 64) refers to as a ‘shamanic attitude’ in which the coach allows “the depths of mystery” to guide them.

This paper reflects aspects of my journey as a TCP coach-in-training, working with a diverse range of people. The TCP approach to coaching supported the embrace of the unknown, the honouring of my client’s emergent process, welcoming of allies, and stepping more fully into intuitive beingness as a coach in service of my clients.

Method

The pro-bono clients I sourced for coaching came via three main pathways and included: non-TCP Alef Trust students, referrals from friends/TCP students and persons who have participated in previous soul-based retreats and online groups in which I was a co-facilitator.

I brought to each coaching session a clear intention to maintain OA, step bravely ‘into the unknown’ with my clients so that I could honour their unique emergent process in the moment and identify and welcome allies present in the coaching container as key guides in the coaching process.

All coaching sessions were conducted online using the Zoom online technology platform. Each client was requested to commit to a minimum of three coaching sessions of up to one and a half hour's duration, and they were each allocated a unique identifier code (e.g. A001).

At the end of the coaching contract, each client was asked to fill in a feedback form. The form used was that provided by Alef Trust (n.d.) with an additional and optional testimonial question added by myself.

Results

The results draw on coaching sessions offered to eight clients, most of these brought to the session any issue, challenge, or query they desired. One client who had multiple sessions had an overarching goal of being able to identify and align with their soul’s purpose.

The clients I worked with were diverse in their ethnicity, location, age and stage of life, profession, gender, family composition and motivation by needs and values (Maslow as cited in Dängeli, 2022). I feel that the diversity and uniqueness of each client was met well through the intention(s) brought into each session. By surrendering to the unknown, supported in OA, it was possible to welcome allies to adopt a flexible and fluid approach – intuitive beingness as coach. I expand upon these intentions below.

Surrendering to the unknown - supported with OA

Early in the coaching process, I realised there were a lot of unknowns. These included: the clients and their history, what they wanted to bring to each session to work on, the type of OA approach I should facilitate and overall, how I might navigate the session in the best interest of the clients' processes. In reflection, I realised that I needed to embrace the unknown, my reflective process on this can be seen in an excerpt from my journal below.

...On all levels, in all ways I just need to prepare myself through entering OA prior to the session and open the door to the unknown with my clients and trust – trust deeply and completely that the sessions will unfold as they need to as long as I am responsive to my clients. And I can only be fully responsive at multiple levels if I am in OA and 100% with them in the moment, energetically, spiritually, cognitively and emotionally – heart to heart.

My embracing of the unknown was an attitude and way of working (or not necessarily doing) that I brought to every coaching session. Once this became a clear and conscious intention, which happened following about four of the coaching client sessions, I felt the coaching session flowed more easily and I could identify and welcome in more fully the emergent material and allies present in the coaching container and leverage these resources more effectively.

Of value was the tailoring of my OA facilitation to the client's process, this is seen in the client feedback included in Appendix A and the extracts below:

“...she [the coach] has the ability to get me to go deep quickly to discover the core of the issue” (H008).

“...the meditation linked me to the subconscious mind and revealed what was present subconsciously... (D004).

“...the meditation from the first session was great, I made some connections that I hadn't seen before, which helped me to address a few areas that needed some attention” (C003).

My embracing of the unknown allowed me to surrender fully into holding space for the clients. The value of this held space can be seen in the feedback excerpts below also included in Appendix A:

“There was time to breathe, ponder, and allow insights and answers to arrive...I felt that having space for silence and contemplation was really useful” (C003).

“...It presented itself, unveiling its intention almost intentionally in Eliza-Beth's presence and the space she created... insightful and really bloody subtle... such a natural process [it]... created trust which allowed me to be vulnerable and open which deepened the work” (A001).

Honouring the emergent process and welcoming allies

In embracing the unknown and being fully present in OA, I was able to work with the client to sense into and identify an emergent process, theme and/or welcome an ally that presented itself. Often this would be a fleeting mention which could easily have been missed but provided the raw ingredients necessary for the coaching alchemical process wanting to emerge and mystery to be followed.

A brief summary of some of the allies and emergent processes that I noted down post session and the way that they supported the sessions is provided in Appendix B. They included: dreams (A001), symbols (G007), visions (D004), archetypes (A001, C003, D004) and metaphors (E005). The reflections in Appendix B, indicate that in leveraging the allies as guides, they offered: a bridge into the clients' unconscious, awareness of shadow aspects needing exploration, reassuring support, guidance for action, ways of being to adopt, layers of support and safety and inner power.

Two clients sum up their experience of this allied approach as; “skilful navigation...tapping into my inner healer and subconscious” (D004) and “I was an explorer...to discover my own unique hidden treasures” (B002) – Appendix A.

Adopting a flexible and fluid approach – intuitive beingness

I realise that the diversity that my clients brought to the sessions was mirrored by my own diverse ways of working with them, as I was required to adopt a flexible and fluid approach and adopt what I believe was intuitive beingness. Descriptions of this approach seen in the testimonial statements in Appendix A included; “helpful and supportive...respectful (G007), “[ability to take] concerns and turn them into practical and manageable steps” (F006), “fully present, holding space” (C003), “professional and successfully navigates the client to where they need to be” (D004), “perfect guide to discover unique treasures and hidden truth” (B002) and “magical whispering she does” (A001).

Discussion

As I reflect on my journey as a coach-in-training throughout this course and the intention I ended up bringing to my sessions, of stepping fully into the unknown and trusting the process and support of OA, the metaphor of learning to ride a bike comes to mind. I feel I started my coaching with my training wheels firmly on and realised in working with external pro-bono clients I needed to remove them. The training wheels here for me were the coaching models, OA meditations, my preconceived ideas about coaching and the theory I studied.

I needed to trust in the power of OA and the resulting coaching container as a space that would facilitate “exploration, discovery and healing in a safe and responsive setting” (Dängeli & Geldenhuys, 2022, p. 127). The container did hold me and my clients and the capacity for therapeutic presence, that is, the ability for a coach to bring their whole self to the session on multiple levels in a grounded, receptive and attuned manner (Geller, 2022). I

provided the safety that the clients needed to be vulnerable and open to the unknown themselves.

I was able to bring a client centred approach by trusting in the client's inherent wisdom and my capacity to meet them and their process where I needed to (Rodgers, as cited in Williams, 2012). I needed to be open to their experience, explore the meaning of it, let it unfold step by step and not judge it in accordance with any preconceived ideas, which is a requirement of transpersonal coaches (Welwood, 2016, as cited in De Vitto, 2019). These orientations in my coaching supported me in embracing the unknown with my clients.

Part of the unknown included the intentional incorporation of allies present in the coaching session. These allies were valuable guides which pointed me to the direction to follow as a coach supporting an unfolding process, which of course was like following a mysterious path only being discovered and formed one step at a time. Partnering with the allies offered a richness and a bridge to accessing my client's unconscious material. Guiding clients deeper into their nature so that the unconscious becomes conscious is an important skill in transpersonal development (Schaub & Schaub, 2015) and a route to the client's deepest wisdom (Sandberg & Henricks, n.d.). The tailored OA meditations and use of the client's allies present in the sessions supported this deep dive into the unconscious and retrieval of wisdom.

We saw that the allies came in many forms including dreams, symbols, visions, archetypes, and metaphors. I cannot help but feel that the power of sessions in which these allies were leveraged would have greatly been diminished if, as coach, I did not consciously bring awareness to their presence and intention to welcome them in as guides. I also feel that it was the receptive state of OA and the resulting "flow of pure experience interconnected with the rest of reality" as described by Dängeli (2019, p. 7), that was an essential enabler of the approach taken. In the process of working with allies and emergent processes, clients were supported to discover empowered states of being and authentic actions to carry out of the sessions with them in support of their transformational growth.

The diversity I experienced on my coaching journey with my clients and the diverse way in which I was called upon to *be* with them is a way that could be described as *intuitive beingness*. This way enables coaches to fully meet their clients where they are at, by being; flexible, fluid, responsive and receptive, and, to work from their intuition through the processes of; *spiritual resonance* (Dängeli & Geldenhuys 2022), *therapeutic presence* (Geller, 2020) and *dynamic stillness* (Schaub & Schaub, 2015). This is a spiritual task and to do it, I believe the focus needs to shift from the *doing* of coaching and more toward the *being* of coaching. It supports the embracing of the unknown in it all – it is intuitive beingness. This is how as TCP coaches we can best meet the diverse needs of our clients and in parallel, honour our own wisdom ways of working.

Conclusion

The capacity for coaches and their clients to step fully into the unknown in a liminal held space through OA in support of welcoming emergent processes and allies so that these can be honoured and leveraged as guides to the unconscious, is essential to the TCP process. In so doing, coaches are accessing their own intuitive beingness which enables them to meet their clients heart to heart in all their uniqueness and diversity. The rewards of this approach are seen in the feedback of the clients featured in this paper, in their experiences in the retrieval and discovery of deeper awareness, spiritual insights, support on their quest of personal freedom and evolution, hidden treasure and empowered steps.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Excerpts of client feedback

Client responses provided in coaching feedback for selected questions

What is your overall impression of the coaching and the approach that your coach took?

I feel that the coaching opens space for exploration, without attempting to push it. There was time to breathe, ponder, and allow insights and answers to arrive. The sessions were held and guided, but loosely, and it felt like there was a relaxed flow to them (C003).

I really enjoyed the personal touch. The coaching was very holistic and I loved how each need and value was addressed. It felt as if I was the explorer and Eliza-Beth was just a guide showing me how to discover my own unique hidden treasures (B002).

What worked well – what was most meaningful to you, and/or what was your greatest insight, and/or what did you enjoy most about the coaching?

I felt that having space for silence and contemplation was really useful. Nothing felt rushed, I never felt that I needed to hurry towards an answer, and that was perfect for me. And the meditation from the first session was great, I made some connections that I hadn't seen before, which helped me to address a few areas that needed some attention (C003).

I particularly enjoyed Eliza-Beth's meditations during the sessions, she has an ability to get me to go deep quickly to discover the core of the issue (H008).

We arrived very quickly, in my view to my soul's work. It presented itself, unveiling its intention almost intentionally in Eliza-Beth's presence and the space she created. Eliza-Beth is very personable, insightful and really bloody subtle. What she does, how she does it, is so natural. Yes, that's my biggest sense, is that it was such a natural process. And that in itself created trust which allowed me to be vulnerable and open which deepened the work. (A001).

What impact did the sessions have on you – did you notice any changes (physical, emotional, mental, energetic, etc.) afterwards that shifted your perspective or your experience in relation to the issue?

I felt the rapport was cohesive and created a safe place for me to explore what was present for me. I liked the skilful navigation and the meditations which tapped into my inner healer and subconscious (D004).

How would you describe this type of coaching to a friend?

Integrative, I was gently navigated into a place I needed to be. It homed in on what was present for me, and the meditation linked me to the subconscious mind and revealed what was present subconsciously” (D004).

If it feels comfortable for you to do so, could you please write a brief statement which I could quote in promotional material.

I have found the transpersonal coaching by Eliza-Beth to be incredibly helpful and supportive in my quest for personal freedom and evolution. It is forward looking whilst being respectful of and acknowledging the impacts of past experiences. I feel it is the next step on from counselling (G007).

Eliza-Beth is a great coach. In each session, we worked through a different issue. She was able to take my concerns and turn them into practical and manageable steps, which has already started making a huge difference in my day-to-day life. I whole-heartedly recommend her (F006).

I recently sat with Eliza-Beth for a few Transpersonal Coaching sessions, and can highly recommend both her, and the approach. She was fully present, holding space for me to explore various areas of my life, which has invited in clarity and understanding. I now feel that I can take empowered steps, which will help me to create a future I am excited to be a part of. Thank you (C003).

Transpersonal Coaching takes you beyond conventional talking therapy. Eliza-Beth is professional and successfully navigates the client to where they need to be. It has been useful in providing me with some deep psychological and spiritual insights – thank you (D004).

Eliza-Beth is the perfect guide to discover unique treasures and hidden truth about yourself (B002).

These coaching sessions have helped me improve my thought process and have opened other paths for me to explore (E005).

Appendix B: Coach summary of client sessions noting key allies and emergent processes.

Summary of selected client sessions noting key allies and emergent process(s).

Dreams

Childhood dream – linked with concept of Life Myth and key polarities/metaphor and figures that play out in their life that can be aligned with authentic expression and purpose. This provided a rich mythic metaphor that supported many of the coaching sessions with this client. Offered a bridge into the unconscious (A001 – Session 1).

Dream night before session – created awareness of unhelpful belief and shadow aspects of the issue being explored (A001 – Session 3).

Symbols

Candle – utilised in OA meditation, brought into session by client, the solid base of the candle and its flickering light provided reassuring support for the session going forward (G007 – Session 1).

Visions

Accessing future self in the role desired as means of guidance for action going forward (C003 – Session 3).

Vision of a man night before coaching session - provided a way of being that the client could adopt to support them navigate their issue. The man's actions in the vision ended up guiding the client's future action(s) for after the session (D004 – Session 1).

Archetypes

Working with 'The Bitch' who transformed into a 'Warrior.' The essence of the inner warrior provided insight into a way of being needed to move forward and support actions (D004 – Session 2).

Inner Healer – support for navigating the unknown and shadowy aspects of the issue with love and compassion. Offered an extra layer of support and safety for the client (D004 – Session 3).

Pirate – meaningful for client's approach to issue, has had a longstanding association with 'being like a pirate' in certain circumstances (A001 – Session 4).

The Sage – showed the client what power needed to be picked up to support action (C003 – Session 1).

Metaphors

Jigsaw puzzle – the process of working through a jigsaw was a powerful metaphor for the client in how they can tackle their issue, in particular the way they can move forward, client does a lot of jigsaws (E005 – Session 3).

Tree – drawing nourishment from the earth – alerted client to an unconscious process they have around food and energy (B002 – Session 1).

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Eliza-Beth is a qualified Holistic Counsellor & Psychotherapist, Shamanic Healer, Transpersonal Coach, Soul & Nature-Based Guide, with a background in Leadership, Outdoor and Environmental Education. She holds a Ba. in Environmental Science and Graduate Diploma in Business Leadership alongside her qualifications in; Coaching, Shamanism, Ecotherapy and Counselling & Psychotherapy. She is passionate about supporting people to connect and discover the inherent soul wisdom they hold and the beauty and power of the natural world as a source of soul guidance, inspiration, and healing for transformational change. Eliza-Beth offers her services through Holistic Soulscape and Wild Sacred Medicine, she is the co-founder of both these therapeutic offerings. Learn more or contact Eliza-Beth at www.holisticsoulscape.com.au or www.wildsacredmedicine.com.au

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Authors of transpersonal coaching case study reports that have been assessed by the respective trainers and supervisors and considered to be a valuable contribution to the advancement of the coaching field, may be invited to submit their reports for potential publication in the TCPJ.

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