

TRAGER[®], A GROWING PROCESS



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When I zoom back and look at my discovery of the Trager® approach, I feel very grateful to the person who mentioned Trager® to me and showed a quick move on a leg. This was ten years ago and I remember very precisely saying to myself that this seemed really interesting and that I would have to look into it some day.

The Trager® approach crossed my path years later, and I immediately felt as if this approach was a fantastic combination of everything that I am interested in: touch, movement, energy, deep exploration and transformation. It felt like this was the necessary step forward.

During the over-a-year Trager® learning process sprouted early on the idea of structuring my essay like a “Dictionnaire amoureux”.

There is no proper English translation. The closest would perhaps be a “Loving glossary”. This literary form is not a dictionary per se but a subjective approach based on a selection of words and concepts related to a chosen and loved theme, in alphabetical order.

I began to list words and concepts that were particularly significant to me in the Trager® learning process, and that necessitated much integration and time to be understood and felt within.

I decided to choose eight, and set myself a framework: freely write approximately one page for each one of them.

I have tried to write in a state of Hook-Up, based on my intimate and inspired feeling of what Trager® is about. I believe this suits the playful free flow of the Trager® approach.

The eight words/concepts I adopted are:

Exploration, Hook-up, Integration, Lightness, Mentastics®, Nothingness, Pause, Recall.

I wish you an enjoyable reading.

EXPLORATION

This has become a key word in my practice.

When a client is standing or sitting in front of me at the beginning of a session, in the present moment, what is his/her inner state of being – state of mind and state of body? What is drawing attention and what is asking for care? Is there something that the person is saying or keeping quiet? What is the person feeling? Is there body language that is speaking out, consciously or unconsciously? These silent and spoken questions and words, and a close observation and deep listening are the grounds of the new experience that will unfold during the session.

The exploration is a dialogue: both the client and I are exploring. First through some Mentastics®, then lying on the table. The client and I are playing and feeling, trying to move differently in a softer and lighter manner, playing with sensations of weight and lightness, feeling how it can be different. It is all about trying to enter in dialogue with what is there. The verbal and body feedback are very useful and helpful to guide the exchange.

Exploring means that there is no set program. The Trager® approach provides me with a framework and an ever-growing experience of moves and feeling. It has been like learning a new language, with words, syntax and grammar. In the Trager® learning process, I was often reminded to come back to asking myself “how should it be? what is softer? what is freer?”. Exploring is clearly all about questioning. With the vocabulary I now possess, what do I feel and how does it feel? Is there something that is limiting movement? Even when I repeat a move, the experience is different every time. Each session is unique, like a new story. The freedom of movement we are moving towards is equivalent to the freedom of speech, and therefore the freedom of being.

The exploration is not linear. As we explore sensations and movement in the body-mind, there is the visible and the invisible effect. It feels like there are so many potential ways that the body-mind will react and move on.

When I am in a state of exploration, I feel that is the right stance to be in. I am not in the role of the one who knows or has the power to magically change things. I am solely sending messages to the body-mind that will invite movement and bring new learning experiences.

It is a lifelong exploration.

HOOK-UP

It was not easy for me to understand what Milton Trager meant by Hook-Up. I first tried to understand it mentally and then finally sensed the signification of it when I started feeling what he meant. If I had to define it simply, I would say it is a form of presence. It is being present to the other and to oneself in an open and connected manner. It is also being connected to the life energy flow that is within and all around us. As Milton Trager said, "we just allow it to happen." It's about being open without trying to do anything special, just being with it, breathing into what is there.

During my training, I gave a session to a woman who looked very dark and sad. She expressed her great difficulty to get over the mourning of her deceased sister six months earlier. At the end of the session, she sat on the table with a big smile on her face, and said to me that she felt joyful and as if she had passed a turning point. It was an amazing experience for both of us. As I moved on in the learning process, I felt that this was probably a beautiful experience of Hook-Up. This experience showed me how a deep connection just happened without my trying to do anything special.

I then presumed that there is less depth in a session when Hook-Up is less present.

I have asked myself more than once if Hook-Up can always be present. The answer could perhaps be that the intention of being in the present moment and in a state of openness to what is, combined with the special Trager® touch, is the path towards this special form of presence.

It seems important to look into oneself to ensure that presence is fully there. Without this deep attention to one's inner state of being, the connection to others may not happen, or not quite happen in a deep and effortless manner.

The time given to oneself is to me an essential foundation of any practice involving care to others. The attention on inner listening brings greater awareness and leads towards a deepening of our inner perceptions. One cannot care for others without caring for oneself. The experience of "self Hook-Up" seems necessary to be in that special state of presence to others.

When there is Hook-Up, the different levels of inner and outer connections are like threads that weave together smoothly to make a deep and transforming exploration possible.

INTEGRATION

The psychophysical integration that the Trager® approach involves means that something in the body-mind needs to be processed and assimilated. Integration is a natural process. The integration and transformation process happens, even when the perception of difference and change is absent. Whether clearly evident, on a subtle level or solely unconscious, this seems to be like an underground movement that could be compared to a storyline, a continuous grid that holds everything together and in perpetual movement.

This processing is not immediate, and surely not the same for everyone. The unconscious patterns are not all identical, and the loosening and transforming process fully depends on the state of being in the present moment.

For example, I noticed a very slow shift in the perceptions of a client during the fifth session with him. The strong resistance felt previously suddenly gave way to a sense of a bit more space, and therefore a sensation of greater freedom and elasticity. Even if very subtle, the change seemed immense, like a huge breakthrough, and I felt great joy. At the end of the session, the client said he had felt literally physically shaken up and sensed a kind of loosening, a letting go that he had not experienced before.

Integration in Trager® is a growing process. It is the inevitable and necessary development of new patterns that generate a greater and deeper awareness of the connections between body and mind.

I think it is around about eight months into the training process that I started realizing that my own body perceptions and sensations had shifted into something new. The explorations in both giving and receiving sessions have permanently modified my own body-mind pattern. I am amazed on how it happened smoothly and without any particular intention or decision to change. It seeped in, almost unnoticed and generated deep and new sensations in inner and outer movement.

I noticed that integration, like a “work in progress”, is most active between movements, and particularly between sessions. A client, who is hooked on Trager®, said to me recently that she would love daily sessions. I replied that time between sessions was necessary for the body and mind to process a brand-new set of feelings and sensations. It is when nothing visible or clearly perceptible is occurring that the integrative process can fully unfold.

LIGHTNESS

Milton Trager insisted on the necessity of feeling the weight of the body parts. This is not contradictory: the sense of lightness cannot exist without feeling weight. They form like a continuum of movement, similar to the interconnection between inhaling and exhaling in breathing. Without the gravity force that allows us to feel weight, we cannot sense lightness.

When I truly started feeling the weight of an arm, it felt like I was lifting tons. I slowly learned to let the weight of the arm settle down within, took the time to feel it and also leave the person the opportunity to sense it as well. Letting the sensation of weight sink in generates a tremendous sense of release and expansion. In turn, this sensation of weight is what will allow the sense of lightness to exist.

This necessary “pre-movement phase” is what allows perception to grow deeper and expand. The experience of letting go through feeling the weight of the body is the direction to follow.

I realized that even the smallest movement could generate the sensation of lightness. It is actual motion that is in nature related to lightness. The pendulum between muscular tension and release is what induces this fascinating feeling of lightness. When the tension release through the sensation of weight allows freedom of movement to develop, then the feeling of lightness can joyfully grow and amplify.

The sensation of spaciousness that the movements provide when the heaviness of tension has gone opens the path to a feeling of something softer and brighter: lightness.

One can actually feel lightness both in the body and in the mind.

How does the feeling of lightness in an arm or a leg develop into something deeper, and in a sense of overall lightness? The processing through the integration phase will “save” the sensations of lightness in its internal hard drive. The body-mind interconnection will bring the physical feeling of lightness through the nervous system into the brain, and it will reach out towards something greater, more global: a sense of a lighter way of moving, a more fluid way of being in relation to the world. The message sent by the Trager® touch through the body connects to the body-mind and goes beyond a mere physical sensation.

This is where lies the holistic dimension of the Trager® approach.

MENTASTICS®

Despite the actual combination of the words mental and gymnastics, Mentastics® are neither completely mental nor a form of gymnastics.

They are a way of rediscovering our body in space through gentle and effortless movements that remind our body that it can feel lighter and softer.

Mentastics® are accessible to everyone, regardless of physical condition, which is an extraordinary and unique feature of this approach.

I did not really understand or appreciate Mentastics® from the start. They slowly but surely grew on and into me, and have now become a part of my daily life.

When I do Mentastics®, I feel that I am letting my body gently wake up by letting the energy tingle up into my body and sharpen my perceptions of how my body can move in space. This is a vector to feeling connected to something light, bright and alive. The mental images used to help move into Mentastics® give a playful touch to this experimental process. They allow us to explore in a creative manner.

There are no right or wrong Mentastics®, no models to follow. Playing with rhythm, finding our own pace, our own sensations of movement, weight and lightness: we are solely moving with the intention of exploring the potentialities that are there. Guiding a client into Mentastics® at the beginning of a session, in a shared experimentation, helps the client unwind and move into an exploration mode. It focuses the attention on body sensations in the present moment, relaxes and prepares for the table work that seems like a natural progression. These different moments in a Trager® session are fully complimentary.

The Mentastics® tune in and anchor us in the here and now in a gentle and peaceful manner, leading to a subtle state of Hook-Up.

It is most useful for the practitioner to also punctuate the table work with some Mentastics®, to remain connected to a tension-free state that lets touch be free flowing and effortless.

The educational function of Mentastics® is developed through movement and letting go. One could even speak of re-education in the sense that Mentastics® and Trager® lead towards a rediscovery of body awareness and most of all of a softer and overall lighter feeling. The continuous questioning, "what could be softer, lighter, and even lighter than that?" is a beautiful invitation to delve into the infinite possibilities that Mentastics® offer.

NOTHINGNESS

I was fascinated when I heard Milton Trager® use the term “nothingness” in one of the videos that I watched at the beginning of my training. I felt at that moment the extraordinary depth of his approach. This word has been with me ever since. This state of mind is similar to the state experienced in meditation. It lets the attention focus on the here and now, outside of any control.

The effortlessness could be the state of being that is the corollary to this experience of nothingness. Letting go, letting it happen without trying to do something, being connected to the universal energy flow. This state of being is anchored in the present moment, in being fully focused on feeling one’s gravity and the weight of the body parts of a client. It is about being receptive, in a state of openness. Being in Hook-Up develops this state of nothingness.

The story written in the present moment unfolds as we move and as the body of the client moves and vibrates. Once the actual moves are integrated, there is no more thinking and mental tension about doing the right thing, about performing in the right manner. That is when feeling and creativity can freely develop.

I regularly say to myself to do less, and even less. This is why I prefer using the term exploration instead of working.

The intelligence of the moment, the presence of the intuition of touch, the overall conversation and interaction between body and mind can just gently spread out.

I feel nothingness like I feel the dilatation of space. The first time I felt the rocking of my belly tissue, it was an extraordinary discovery. I suddenly felt an amazing sensation of space, an opening to something deeper and bigger. It was both nothing and something gigantic. It was not only a connection to new body sensations but also to a sense of possibilities that I was not aware of before. It was space, nothing but space to expand in, and a space of vibrating serenity.

Nothingness is extremely precious. It is the path towards the intricate and subtle dimensions that are contacted through the Trager® approach.

It is reaching out towards the naturalness, feeling the fluidity of the core of the energy of being alive. When there is tension-free space, then comfort, spontaneity and contentment can expand and meet their unique and peaceful expression.

PAUSE

Our Western modern lifestyles do not promote pauses. We are driven by action, and rarely take the time to step back, take time for ourselves. The constant stimuli, information and pressure often build up into a state of stress, and it is up to each one of us to press on "pause" before the tension affects us deeply. When we decide to be attentive to our needs, when we decide to receive a Trager® session, we are taking that healthy step towards our overall wellness. I have noticed that clients often feel like they have experienced a form of journey during the session, with a kind of "coming and going" sensation between body sensations and other dimensions. The timeless dimension of a Trager® session is highly nourishing.

Also, marking short pauses during Mentastics® and table "work" is a necessary part of a session. These precious moments let sensations and perceptions deepen and build up. Our cells can soak up the beneficial sensations of release and memorize this positive information. A pause is another occasion and way to feel Hook-Up.

Stepping back does not mean stepping out or taking time off. It is like a moment of connected breathing without touch. Focusing on the observation of what is unfolding during a pause is an intrinsic part of feeling.

The practitioner is both connected to himself and to the person he is with when he pauses. I have noticed that I often tune into the client's breathing during these pauses, and find myself breathing at the same pace, as if an intimate link was circulating.

The client is at that moment in a state of inner movement, without any outer stimulation, just connected to the vibrating movement of energy flow.

It is interesting for me to note that in the holistic massage approach, it is important to always keep hand contact with the client, providing him with a secure feeling.

A Trager® session is not a massage session. Perhaps, what mostly differentiates a massage from the Trager® approach is the way a session involves the responsiveness of the client, and therefore puts him in a state of responsibility in the transformation process. During a massage, the client is mostly passive, and the experience does not have the learning and transforming potential a Trager® session has. I discovered through the Trager® approach that pauses potentiate the effectiveness and power of sensations and movement.

RECALL

I was too busy learning to worry about recall. It took me a while before I started putting some attention on the notion of recall. What was there to recall? Wasn't the session enough?

A Trager® session leaves an imprint in the body, and an informational trace in the body-mind's memory. The body cells and therefore the body-mind have the capacity to memorize every single experience, positive or negative.

Everyday life draws us away from the tension-free sensations that were discovered, or re-discovered during a session. In order to remind ourselves of the positive sensations that were explored, we need to pause and come back to an inner connection to body sensations to recall that it can feel lighter, and even lighter and softer than that.

This needs the help of a move or several moves, a body attitude or way of moving or walking that will reopen the connection to the positive sensations and feelings that are part of who we are. I now invite the client to find that personal unique way of moving in the here and now that will be his reminder, that can be reproduced at any time once back in his daily life.

Recall is something spontaneous, like a non-verbal way of expressing the joy of feeling peace in a relaxed body at the end of a session.

It is related to the integration process, to the "in between" growth and transformation. It calls upon the body's intelligence to be able to reawaken at any moment to calming, open and fluid sensations.

The resonance of the vibrations of inner movement has modified our core patterns. The repetition of movements is the impulse that brings us back to a state that we deeply know. It is a form of "re-education", a re-learning process in which recurrence is necessary. Yet, it is each time a bit different, in perpetual movement, anchored in the here and now. The recall deepens both the sensations and their inherent reality, and can be the perfect way to introduce Mentastics® into daily life.

The way we move in our inner and outer space is like our personal music, in tune with who we are. Recalling the mellow harmonious melody in ourselves can grow into beautiful dancing clouds.

As I was slowly moving into writing my essay, I got a call from a potential client. After he told me about his back problems, I suggested he try a Trager® session and have a look at the Trager® website. A while later, we spoke again and he said straight away: « this is not for me, it's too deep ». After discussion, we left it there. It had me thinking. Yes, Trager® sessions are very deep as they touch the core of our being. Not everyone is ready for such a deep experience and inner connection to oneself.

The clients who have had the curiosity to come discover this approach have often said that it is unlike anything they have ever experienced before. The visible “before and after” effect of a Trager® session is often quite spectacular. Clients look brighter, more open and joyful, and anchored in a state of unified harmony.

The greatness of the approach is that it doesn't stop at the end of the session. The process continues, the inner movement keeps on radiating and deepening. I myself have discovered amazing new sensations and felt deep inner transformation.

Like after a summer rain, when the perfumes in nature are magnified, Trager® grows into you, without ever being invasive.

It has been a fabulous learning experience, cultivating the soft intuitive touch and feeling in a state of Hook-Up with a “beginner's mind”.

It is thrilling to know that there is so much more to explore and feel, that it never ends.

Trager® deserves full and greater recognition, and I will do my best to honor it through my practice and shared values and ethics.

There is a way of being
Which is lighter
Which is freer
A way in which work
As well as play
Becomes a dance
And living a song
We can learn this way

Milton Trager

