

## **A Brief History and Hallmarks of the Interactive**

### *A Brief Discussion of the Double Empathic Moment, the Relationship Check and the Interactive Response and How They Came To Be*

*By Dr. Janet Klein<sup>1</sup>*

The Focusing partnership/exchange, known to all Focusers, is the backbone of the Interactive. Most of us are familiar with the Focusing partnership because it can be the best way to learn Focusing. And it is a very valuable experience. If you know Focusing and the Focusing partnership, it is only a short step to mastering the Interactive. *Note: The Focusing process is the essential ingredient of Interactive Focusing, and I am always **beholden to Gendlin** and his groundbreaking work.*

#### **It was my personal story that led me to develop the Interactive**

I don't know whether the objectives of the Partnership and the Interactive are different fundamentally or peripherally. I don't know what Gendlin had in mind when he formulated the partnership model. I used to think it was connected to his desire to find a way to make psychotherapy free. I shall ask him one day. But this is the antecedent of the Interactive for me: It was the mid-1980s. I was going through a divorce and feeling alone and adrift when I started this work. *This* is what I wanted. I wanted a way to connect to other people in a deep, feeling and genuine way. After all, I was losing a husband, the person who was supposed to make that kind of connection a possibility if not a reality. It was one of those *simple* but *not easy* 'wants.'

#### **Distinguishing characteristics of the Interactive, how it is different from a Focusing Partnership/Exchange. And how my experience and *wantings* influenced me in discovering these differences**

A Focusing partnership/exchange is comprised of a storyteller/focuser and a listener. In theory, it is a balanced exchange of Focusing and listening. At the time I learned about Focusing partnerships, we were openly told not to intrude on the other person's process, material and space. That meant that we kept our stories separated from one another's; we didn't comment on what we just heard; we didn't analyze; we didn't try to fix anything; and we never commented on the relationship itself. I considered the partnership transactional, each side a separate entity or transaction. By definition and practice, the Interactive is interactional. We **do** take in the other person's story. We sense into the several things about each other we can know or discover. This 'taking in' marks the Empathic Moment, the Interactive Response and the Relationship Check.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note from the Editor: Dr. Janet Klein sadly passed away in 2010. Her website, her email address, and any links in this document are inactive. Questions can be directed to Barbara Dickinson as editor, [barbara.i.dickinson@gmail.com](mailto:barbara.i.dickinson@gmail.com)

I practiced the partnership almost weekly with a dedicated partner for several years. It was invaluable. Learning Focusing this way helped me move forward to discover the additional things I wanted in a Focusing relationship.

### *Interviews with the Focusing Pioneers*

In the 1980s I was working on a doctoral paper. I thought I would write about something Gendlin seemed very interested in at that time, the Focusing Partnership. I started out to examine Focusing partnerships by using an experiential interview. I enlisted over a dozen people who had longstanding and ongoing partnerships. Many of these people had started with Gene as he was developing the Focusing model. Gene was then teaching at the University of Chicago in Hyde Park. I believe they formed a Changes group and met to partner at the University Church in Hyde Park.

I began a pilgrimage that took me from Chicago to California to find out what Focusing partnerships were so I could write my doctoral paper on them. The interview was simple. I asked if I could be present during a partnership process. Could I remain in the room with them silently and tape record the exchange. I decided that after observing this process, I was going to ask each person in the partnership to comment on what their partner and their partnership meant to them. I asked them to examine this from the felt sense of it.

It was a remarkable experience for me and for the partners, also. I heard time and again that they had never talked about this out loud before. I heard the most touching words to describe how they felt about one another. It was a testimonial to their deep, caring connection. None of the couples I interviewed were married to one another, yet the appreciation and affection they felt was profound and palpable. Sometime during this interview journey, I realized I had ‘a tiger by the tail.’ I wanted to craft something new based on these partnership exchanges I was privileged to witness. I wanted to design interactions to encourage this kind of connection. This is when interaction went from lower case ‘i’ to upper case ‘I’, when interaction became **I**nteraction.

### ***Hallmarks of the Interactive***

The Interactive starts as a Focusing partnership (when two people commit to one another to share a series of sessions) or a Focusing exchange (when two people process in a single session without intending to continue processing together). It is a pair of Focusers taking turns Focusing and listening to one another.

What distinguishes the Interactive is the addition of the *Empathic Moment*, the *Interactive Response* and the *Relationship Check*. Often, after completing the full model, the participants talk about what just happened. Though this isn’t a formal part of the model, it proves most valuable. It is a “meta’ position, a bit theoretical, *about* the experience. Sometimes it is just saying what happened for us.

### ***The three aspects that differentiate Interactive Focusing***

In this paper, I will only touch on these three aspects that differentiate Interactive Focusing from Focusing partnerships/exchanges. I will write fuller descriptions about these topics as seminar papers.

#### **The Empathic Moment/Response**

I consider the Empathic Moment the *golden moment* in relationship. It is when listening turns into empathically understanding the other person. Sometimes I get the feeling of a click inside, and the *me* becomes a *we*. That is a special time in relationship. It is special the first time it happens. And we too easily forget that we need to renew this to maintain a connected, shared relationship.

I developed the form of the Empathic Moment during this same time I was doing my doctoral work. Again, this was in response to my own story and my own personal need. Though I had a good understanding of the definition of empathy, I never had a sense of it inside myself. I knew what it was, but I couldn't feel it. I could behave in an empathic manner because I knew what it was supposed to look like. In reality, it was meaningless to me because I couldn't feel it. I didn't feel phony. I felt jealousy, jealous of all those people who were experiencing empathy. I wanted to feel it, too. It was one of those desperate *wantings* that drove me to find a way I could be like all those people who actually seemed to feel it. Without it I realized I felt boredom, that deadening feeling that sometimes stalks me and from which I unceasingly flee. I thought genuine empathy would be enlivening. I don't know what accounted for my *stunted development of empathy*. I also realized that I wasn't the only person suffering from this.

The Empathic Moment was the result of this longing. It happened quite unexpectedly. I was exchanging Focusing with a friend. I was the first listener. He had finished his side, and I was about to begin my side. Suddenly I said, Wait a minute. Something special is happening in me or...between us. I asked him to take some time with me right there.

I held on to that thread and pondered it for some time until it became clear. I was noticing a moment of genuine, body-felt empathy. I then set about trying to see if I could develop a way to fairly consistently recreate the opening for that sense of empathy to materialize and grow in me. Was there a form I could follow to get myself ready for that experience. Voila. The Empathic Moment.

#### **The Interactive Response**

The Interactive Response is in response to my asking myself, What of my storyteller's story touches inside me. What of my own stuff got touched inside me as I listened to her tell her story.

What I discovered in my doctoral paper research, when I listened to all of those partners processes, was that they were often if not always touched by a lot of what their partner had just revealed. Often, though they valiantly tried to keep their

individual processes separated, much of the content shared the same topic. I started discussing this with the partners as I was interviewing them, the fact that though they kept their processes separated, the content was often so similar. None of them had thought about that before, but each agreed that when it was brought to their attention, this was their experience, also.

The fact that we are deeply touched by our storyteller's story has been validated for me when I teach the Interactive in groups. The way I teach is to have real Interactions with each member of the group individually as the other members participate by observing us. I will have an Interactive session with the first person. When the second person has her turn, it is almost always connected to the theme of the story of the first storyteller.

Another interesting aspect I have noticed is that the second storyteller often but not always starts at a deeper place. And it is a surprise that the first storyteller's story touched something so deep in the second person. This is especially true when it is a process involving a deep human truth. The issue is something that needed processing, but the second storyteller wasn't aware of it until the first story was told. The first storyteller has had to work her way down into her story, her truth in the moment. The second storyteller seems primed by listening to her, just as a water pump is primed by pouring some water down into the pipe.

### **The Relationship Check**

The relationship check is the forbidden question in all ships carrying relationships: friendships, love-ships, personal and business partnerships. It seems to be tacitly forbidden to overtly question where we are in our relationship right now. How do you feel about me now that I have revealed all of that to you. And where am I with myself. How do I feel about me inside of myself right now after revealing all of that to you and to myself.

Again, this was from personal wanting. I always wanted to know what other people thought of me but was too timid or too polite or too frightened to risk asking. Now that I was a Focuser, I wanted to know how other people *felt* about me. One day, during an Interaction I had the courage to ask. It became a full time part of the model from then on. It is very valuable information. It makes the relationship feel much safer when I know how I stand with the other person. I have had great agreement from the people I share Interactive sessions with. We want to know the current shape of the relationship.

### **About these seminars:**

*I offer a series of seminar papers along with audio recordings of actual Interactive sessions to illustrate the theme of the particular paper. I hope this will be a way to teach Interactive Focusing to people who already know the Focusing process.*

*This could increase the number of Interactive Focusers and help in organizing a pool of participants to form a listing of people who want to share Interactive sessions. We who know or want to know the Interactive are distributed in far-flung places, worldwide. Perhaps we can connect especially through our new information technologies like Skype or telephonically.*

***I have organized the Seminar subjects thusly:***

A brief history and hallmarks of the Interactive

Why Interactive Focusing

Reasons for developing it and brief history

Similarities to and differences from Focusing partnerships/exchanges

Types of Interactions and situations they're useful in

Conflict healing

Exploring deep human truths

Communication method in relationship

Other types

Seminar topics

A brief history and hallmarks of the Interactive

Empathic moment/response

Interactive response

Relationship check

Coaching

Therapy

Other topics

***Training to become Interactive teachers:***

*Masumi Maeda and Mieko Ito have started a training program in Japan to teach others to become teachers of the Interactive. I have designated them Master Teachers so you will know they have all the experience, skills and talent to teach others not only to practice the Interactive but to teach others how to teach the Interactive. I have joined them in developing a program to accomplish this.*

*I welcome inquiries from others who want to teach the Interactive.*

***Available resources:***

*My publications are available free of charge by contacting me through my e-mail*  
[drjanetklein@yahoo.com](mailto:drjanetklein@yahoo.com)

*My website has much information about the Interactive*  
[www.interactivefocusing.com](http://www.interactivefocusing.com)

*Handout available: The Model described by Mary Melady, edited by Janet Klein*  
[drjanetklein@yahoo.com](mailto:drjanetklein@yahoo.com)  
[www.interactivefocusing.com](http://www.interactivefocusing.com)  
[interactivefocusing.ning.com](http://interactivefocusing.ning.com)

[drjanetklein@yahoo.com](mailto:drjanetklein@yahoo.com)

[www.interactivefocusing.com](http://www.interactivefocusing.com)  
[interactivefocusing.ning.com](http://interactivefocusing.ning.com)