

Structural Integration Practitioners as Facilitators of Change: Adult Education Theories and SI

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Abstract

Although we may consider ourselves therapists of the body, we are more so facilitators and educators of change in human lives and living according to the lineage of structural integration (SI). This article opens discussion and awareness of SI practitioners' impact as facilitators of change using some of the learning models in adult education. Learning models chosen for the purposes of this paper and affiliation to the SI model include critical reflection and thinking, self-directed learning, and transformational learning. We have the ability to guide our clients toward autonomy and self-realization by our own awareness of concepts, including those mentioned above in conjunction with fascial re-patterning. The outcome of this shift in definition for an SI practitioner from therapist to facilitator creates ease, grace, and breadth in our work.

Introduction

"Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death." (Anais Nin)

By way of expanding our working model to define our profession, this article introduces the idea of the structural integration practitioner as a facilitator of change and critical reflection. We invite critical sensing through "touch to know." As a result we (ourselves and our clients) become beings capable of critical reflection and thinking.

We face the challenge of how to define ourselves as structural integration practitioners and provide a standard scope of practice for our work. It is a difficult profession to put into words, as SI is more about the experience and the process than a set of techniques. We know this, but how to convey this work to clients and colleagues is often fraught with confusion and vagueness. This author poses we shift our perspective from "therapists" or "body workers" to facilitators.

Relevant topics for discussion include the role, skills, and characteristics of facilitators and the principles of effective facilitation. Complementary to this, I will present an overview of self-directed learning, critical reflection/thinking (via critical sensing), and transformational learning. In any learning environment, including structural integration, change happens at the intersection of skillful facilitation and willing participant.

Change and Process Living

Every time I visit the ocean shoreline of the West coast, I am reminded of change. The shoreline shifts every morning when I run along the sea wall. Throughout the day the mysterious and unseen work of the ocean tides provides a rich lesson in change, chaos, stability, and renewal. The underpinnings of the tidal forces work behind the scenes nudging a new beach, a new world to emerge. The human body is analogous to the ocean: Such tides within the watery fascial planes are nudged by the mechanical forces and intentional craft through the practitioner's hands. It is here, right here, where we have the chance and opportunity to encourage graceful re-patterning and support for the human quest towards change.

We are nature: composed of earth, water, fire, air and ether. Like it or not, we cannot escape from the varying moods and shifts of nature herself. With each season there is fundamental inquiry to morph into new shapes, new life forms; to let go of old patterns, old life forms. Life is a process, not a result. Many forms of medicine and health care work with the repair and remediation model to fix something, somehow bypassing the progression towards wholeness. The only way out is through: This is true of structural integration; this is true of life itself.

Our work in structural integration is difficult to define, so is living in process. How does one define a sun rise or the rising and lowering of an ocean tide? Although definitions can, at times, be useful, what

can happen is a rationalization and therefore potential separation into reductionist thinking. We may lose the systems thinking model we have earned hard to offer our clients. Author Anne Wilson Schaef (1) writes that symptoms appear when participation in the process stops. We are meant to be participatory in our living and in our being. Many models in relaxation, repair, and remediation offer a rather non-participatory contribution. If structural integrators are viewed as “manipulators” of the body, the impact of our work is diminished.

My heart sinks when I discuss practice strategies with other SI practitioners and find that they have succumbed to the repair and remediation model, because that is what sells. True enough, we need to pay bills. However, how far will we stray from the lineage, from Ida’s original vision? I have walked the massage therapy road for many years before finding SI and they are not the same despite the melding of SI and “myofascial release.” Such melding can have a terrific pull until we come together as a community and offer our expertise in fascial re-patterning and movement re-education in a way that values the process as much as, if not more than, the outcome.

The Role of the Facilitator

Facilitation is a process, a way of providing leadership without taking the reins (2). In contrast to “teacher,” who is required to be the sage on the stage, facilitators are more likely to be guides on the side. Knowing this we begin, as SI practitioners, to lose the title of therapist in order to shift into facilitator.

From an adult education learning model, some of the highlights important to the tasks of facilitation include:

- providing processes that help learners use their time efficiently to make higher quality decisions,
- helping a learner or group of learners to understand their own processes in order to work more effectively,
- making sure that assumptions are surfaced and critically examined for effectiveness,
- supporting learners in assessing current skills and behaviours and in building new ideas,
- managing conflict, and
- fostering leadership through our own modeling (3).

So it is with SI and our role as practitioners and as facilitators. This is the beauty of the SI model: There is a beginning, middle, and an end. And within this process lies the container of each session, whether it is 10 as in the original Rolfing® series, 11 as in Hellerwork® SI, or 12 as in Tom Myers KMI model. Practitioners facilitate change, change in the potential capacity of humans to

live a life towards thriving, as best as we are able with what we have been born to live through.

Principles of Effective Facilitation

Outcomes often associated with education and facilitation are multidimensional. Such outcomes include empowerment, self-actualization, self-realization, and autonomy. The foundation for solid facilitation work is to be the guide on the side and the lamplighter that helps illuminate a learner’s mind for their own learning capacity (4). Facilitators know that the answers lie within the individual or community and all that is really needed is a held space for exploration, curiosity, imagination, and movement. Is this not what we do as SI practitioners?

Facilitation must be based upon mutual respect and collaboration: It is not a passive model, rather one that is engaged and active in commitment (5). Stephen Brookfield, an adult education scholar, defines six principles of facilitation (1986) that hold similarities to the role of practitioners in the SI process. These include:

- learners participate on a voluntary basis, even if the decision has been pressed by an outside force such as trauma, life crisis, etc.;
- effective practice is characterized by mutual respect of participant’s self-worth;
- facilitation is based on collaborative processes so that practitioner and client work together to identify needs, set objectives, explore, discuss, negotiate, etc.;
- the use of praxis or the connection between reflection and application;
- facilitation encourages critical reflection and the examination of current values, beliefs, behaviours and ideologies that have been culturally induced and that alternative structures and behaviors exist;
- facilitation aims toward the development of self-directed and empowered beings who will have the ability to continually re-evaluate, renegotiate, and reinvent their personal relationships, work situations, and social structures.

These are complex relationships between SI practitioner and client. As Scott Gauthier points out in his article, “The Experiential Field of Structural Integration: Diversity produces variant perspectives on the scope and definition of SI” (2010), there is a broad range of experience between practitioner, client, and each other’s worlds. Our work then becomes more challenging than the obvious physical bodywork and manipulation: There are unseen happenings at the edges of such transformational alchemy (6). This transition always contains issues of stability/instability, certainty/uncertainty, and death/rebirth. We live in process, we live in patterns. As humans living in rapid technological

times, we may be losing the ability to connect with the process of living and transitioning into fully mature adults and thriving human beings. Structural integration practitioners have the gift, the potential, to facilitate this process. As facilitators we offer supportive space for our clients to re-pattern slowly over time outmoded ways of living—physically, emotionally, and mentally. We understand the unity of body and mind. We have moved away from the old reductionist model that separated body and mind and treated the human being as a mechanical device to be used, dominated, and repaired. SI moves away from the models of repair and remediation and into the model of education, self-awareness, and realization.

Roles, Skills, and Characteristics of Effective Facilitators

So much of our work as SI practitioners supports the path of each individual toward becoming a full human being and maximizing human potential. This lies close to the humanistic philosophy, as defined in effective facilitation and educational models. In humanist philosophy, the focus and the approach to learning is to encourage people to explore the richness of their feelings, working towards building a healthy self-concept and honoring human life (7). Furthermore, facilitators/educators must possess the ability to be empathetic and supportive, knowing that each individual is innately good and that all beings are on a quest towards self-discovery and being partners in learning. As facilitators we intuitively know that we are all capable of growth and change, for this is the path nature takes, and we ourselves are nature indeed. In Structural Integration our master goal is to help facilitate that process.

The humanist approach to learning and facilitation is the belief that adults will take responsibility for their own learning, providing the psychosocial environment is supportive to do so (8). Malcolm Knowles, a pioneer in adult education, (1980) further suggests that effective facilitators will work diligently to provide a foundational platform of mutual trust, respect and helpfulness, freedom of expression, and the acceptance of diversity.

Critical Sensing, Critical Reflection, and Critical Thinking

Brookfield (1987) supports the nurturing work of facilitators as well as the timely ability to nudge participants toward a more meaningful learning experience. In order to deepen the experience and offer the full potential, any learning at this level of intention will include the encouragement to consider alternative ways of thinking and living, which inevitably means a re-evaluation of supposed universal truths, beliefs, values, and behaviors (9). This then becomes the

defining moment in every human being's life, to walk in the world anew, changed and fully capable of holding that change autonomously and together. As SI practitioners, we move through the body into the mind, through soma to psyche. In this way, we work towards human potential and evolution.

Critical reflection lifts the veil of both positive and negative emotions. This becomes apparent in the core sessions of the SI series. Because we have all traveled our own roads of dismantling and rebuilding within the SI model as recipients ourselves, we can hold acute awareness for the pain, the joy, and the enthusiasm participants embark upon throughout the process. As practitioners and facilitators of SI we become sensitive to the gentle nuances within the verbal and non-verbal communication process; we invite and support all emotions as part of the self-learning process and encourage emotions in a non-intrusive manner, remaining genuine, nonjudgmental, and empathic as guides and fellow travelers.

The process of critical reflection and thinking is not linear. Even within the "recipe," goals and anatomy are revisited. The SI process correlates to key components of adult learning:

- becoming aware of existing values, assumptions, and/or behaviors, along with the context within which they exist and influence our lives;
- exploring alternatives and even challenging the status quo;
- staying with and working with the emotions that arise with transition and change;
- integrating the new awareness into our lives, and finally,
- taking concrete action towards a new perspective or new way of being (10).

Clearly, SI practitioners and facilitators who successfully contribute to the promotion of critically sensing (touch to know), reflecting, and thinking are themselves adventurers along their own developmental paths. Staying awake, alert, curious, engaged, and supportive, we hold such valuable reverence for the all-encompassing human spirit to live fully, thriving, and on purpose.

Self-Directed Learning

We know that more happens to our clients outside of our office doors than within them. We are more interested in what they learn about themselves and their process between appointments. We are not interested in fixing up symptoms to make them happy again because we know that sustainability walks a different path. This may be one of the most challenging agreements when we shift from "therapist" to "facilitator." Knowles (1975) points out that effective education and facilitation can only be acquired when learners know about the

possibilities and benefits of learning that are beyond the classroom (11). Here we are faced once again with a change in definition away from teacher to facilitator and from transmission of information to facilitation of learning.

Our clients may rebel against the wonderment of self-directed learning. They may want to be fixed and symptomless, and as we read these words, we can hear Ida speak: "If their symptoms go away, that's their problem!" (12). When confidence wanes as it often will, what is an SI practitioner to do? First and foremost, we as SI practitioners must clearly and concisely state the proposed model of SI. It is not relaxation. It is not repair and remediation. Although these two situations might occur, as they often do, the intention of the SI model is education. We must be clear to state the intention, attention, and outcome for this work. Often clients come to me confused by massage and physiotherapy, richly rewarded in relaxation, repair, and remediation, and I must be solid in my own experience and my own conviction that SI is not the same. If clients understand the process and self-direct themselves onward, then we have a mutual team of two beings moving forward together. If they initially engage and falter half way through (so often when the core work reveals its true self) then I must reassure them that they will not be abandoned or fail; that as a facilitator and SI practitioner, I will continue my commitment to be their resource, coach, and mentor throughout the process.

We can encourage our clients to welcome and value the unexpected as part of their learning process. Author and poet Guillaume Apollinaire writes:

"Come to the edge," he said.

They said, "We are afraid."

"Come to the edge," he said.

They came. He pushed them and they flew.

My most rewarding experience is to witness clients who accept the invitation to spread their own wings and fly without a push. This fosters an autonomous model where only adventure surely lies ahead. To encourage motivation, it becomes imperative that clients take ownership that is ongoing and consistent, within reason. Ongoing evaluation and assessment are important to successfully maintaining a client's motivation throughout the SI experience. Not only do I educate about the outcome of each session, but I will tie it into the larger process or series. This continual need for engagement and assessment is a reason why I educate and support my clients about the useful benefit of journaling. As the relationship finds itself on more solid and trustworthy grounds, confidential sharing from the client begins to take root. Again, effective facilitation requires listening and honoring their individual path while holding a safe space for dialogue and examination.

Overall, the purpose of facilitation is to assist individuals in taking control and waking up to the journey of their own lives, their interpersonal relationships, and the structures and environment within which they live. The literature is full of varying arguments and viewpoints. However, we could boil down the essence of effective facilitation skills and competencies as core issues, considering interpersonal skills, expertise in content, skills, techniques, and curriculum. These competencies are snugly rooted in humanistic philosophy and ethical guidelines. It is important to allow us as practitioners to shift the way we facilitate the SI process as we move along our own continuum of process and change.

Transformational Learning

Educators such as Jack Mezirow are helpful contributors to the notion of critical awareness, transformative action, critical reflection, and thinking (13). What's interesting in the adult education model, as with SI, is the perspective of a "disorienting dilemma" that initiates a kind of reflection and rethinking of former perceptions and attitudes. Adult education includes a simplistic view of learning a new skill, gaining knowledge, and/or changing an attitude, value, or perception (14). SI covers similar ground. Participants of the process learn a new skill called "how to move with more grace and ease in the field of gravity." Participants of the SI process gain knowledge (in this case, self-awareness) and move toward self-realization and actualization. Participants of the SI process may indeed examine core values, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions as they de-pattern and re-pattern their connective tissue web called fascia.

We have been delightfully invited to share in the newfound science and spectacle of body maps as related to us by fellow SI practitioner Kevin Frank in conversation with Sandra Blakeslee, *New York Times* science contributor and co-author of *The Body Has a Mind of Its Own* (15). Frank outlines the leading edge we have as practitioners of fascial re-weaving. The tissue is a sensory organ and plastic, which makes fascia capable of re-negotiation with regards to body image, adaptation, and change. Frank writes: "Paying attention to the body is a key factor in facilitating change." (16)

Transformational learning, according to educator Jack Mezirow, is often triggered by a disorienting dilemma (17). Such triggers can be anything from job loss or death to an influx of creativity unknown to the individual. Stages have been identified to include:

- the intense process of self-examination,
- a critical assessment of personally internalized role assumptions with a sense of alienation from traditional social roles,
- exploration of options for new roles,
- relationships and actions,

- acquisition of knowledge or skills to implement new plans,
- building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and
- the reintegration into society renewed.

Mezirow spoke of the role of the facilitator as one to guide and encourage a “rational discourse” through the transformational process (18). He speaks of the fine line between the role of facilitator and therapist. So it is with structural integration: a fine line between therapist and facilitator/educator. We are well-versed in anatomy and technically astute, so we come to the table well-equipped to engage the client in rational discourse as they undergo the sometimes unsteady terrain of transition and change.

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” (Anais Nin)

Conclusion

The adult education models addressed in this article introduce a new way of seeing and working with structural integration in the world today. Because the author has little experience in working with children, this article takes on a limited view of the full capacity of structural integration. This is not to exclude the value of working with children and youth. Perhaps future writings will honour the worlds of both adult and children while continuing with the theme of facilitators rather than therapists.

Margaret Wheatley, organizational behaviorist and author, suggests that the answers we so often seek are always in the community (19). This is a community of structural integration practitioners and adult educators/facilitators. The time for the lone wolf is perhaps over, and structural integration must look beyond its borders for a fuller, richer way to define its work. It is my opinion that we, as a profession and professionals, take our work to a value-added model, not for the purposes of being elitist over any other form of therapy, but rather to set a plausible and meaningful boundary of who we are within a common web of similar practitioners and therapists including massage, chiropractic, osteopathic, physiotherapy, and others. Perhaps if we take on the role of facilitator in human change and process living, we can relax and breathe deeply into the vast and enriching territory of structural integration. It has always been a model indicating change, expansion, and breadth.

Ida’s message was clear and continues to hold the backdrop for structural integration: a model of education. Similarly, author Alvin Toffler wrote: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” Next article: structural integration and literacy!

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