

The Psychology Curriculum of F.O.B.

An Interview with Til Luchau

March 6, 1996

by Bill Harvey

BH: When I was trained, twelve years ago at this point, psychology as a subject matter wasn't touched at all. We had very sophisticated judges of human character in the teachers. Some of that had to rub off but my question is, what's happening now? Now there is pre-training, which wasn't around when I was training. It offers an opportunity for doing something, but what?

TL: Well, the potential for doing something in pre-trainings is definitely there, and the actuality is a constant balancing act between what's available in terms of resources and what we'd ideally like to give them. When I first started teaching the F.O.B. in '89 we had twenty-five hours of psychology.

BH: Wow. What was the curriculum for that?

TL: There was very little set curriculum. It was a troublesome spot in the training because there wasn't a set curriculum. It was taught by an outside teacher who'd come in for a couple hours a week. Twenty-five hours out of 250 total. Both teachers and students were having a hard time with it. Various teachers would do different things, some would teach about transference, counter-transference and others about emotional

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expression, but by and large it was the area that students felt the least happy with. I took the psychology part of it over in '91 and reorganized it. The interface of psychological and structural work has been a big passion of mine, Bill, for years. My first training, before I did body work, was in different kinds of psychotherapy. And it was actually my Gestalt teacher who said, "If you want to know about people's emotions, you need to go into the body." Being right there at Esalen at the time, there were all sorts of resources for doing that.

BH: What time frame are we talking about? How long ago was this?

TL: '83. The ways that structure and psyche are aspects of the same phenomena have always been one of my big passions. So anyway, when I reorganized the F.O.B. Psychology class, I asked, "If they're going to give me only this much time to teach, what are the most important things?" And it's obviously not Freudian stuff, not an in-depth training in psychotherapy. It's not even how to do therapy in twenty-five easy hours. It came to be a course, essentially, in how not to do harm.

I started breaking that down into different areas like the proper use of power and influence, boundaries for both clients and therapists, and basic kinds of listening and facilitating skills. As Rolfers, generally our work has a kind of desired outcome, it's not super rigid, but there is something we'd like to see at the end of a session. Sometimes we have an agenda. That's a tricky thing to combine with the agendaless attitude that seems to work best in psychotherapy, in the psychological realm. So dancing with that paradox has been a big thing in the class too. "How can I step back and be with someone?" That's the complimentary skill that's often needed, rather than

how to press on my clients what I think should happen here. It's a humility training too, at least at the F.O.B level because there's two kinds of problem areas. One is the over-confident person who thinks, "Now I've got a few tools, I can go out and really help people psychologically," without really knowing enough to be able to respect the client's rhythm in the process. And the other one is being overly-cautious and stepping way back and freaking out anytime something emotional comes up. It's steering toward a middle ground, giving people enough humility about the fact that there are limits to what you can help people with, you just have to be with them so that they can do what they need to do. That's the kind of philosophical slant it's been taking.

A couple of years ago we actually changed the name from "Psychology" to "Therapeutic Relationship." That seemed like a more accurate description of what we were teaching. If I were the king of the Rolf training, we would spend more time on how to deal with emotions specifically, or how to deal with psychological issues as they show up in the body. We get into some of that in the F.O.B. but it's mostly about how not to do harm within that kind of relationship.

BH: Do you have like a top ten do's and don'ts?

TL: Top ten do's and don'ts? No, that would be interesting to do. We have a bunch of resources, though.

BH: Don't laugh when the clients starts crying. Don't smoke a cigar.

TL: Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. I don't think we've quite cooked it down to something that concentrated. We do have a bunch of materials the students go through and we have it divided up into topics.

There's one other piece that happened about a year or two ago in this curriculum. There was pressure to make the training more competitive. At that time, the prevailing mood was to keep it as affordable and as short as possible. One of the areas that got cut as being not central to the training was the psychology part of F.O.B. It was cut back to nine hours from twenty-five. Recently, it's been raised back up to twenty-two hours, as a part of a curriculum review. But what that meant is having to cram a lot of the material into an even shorter time. Unfortunately it's less experiential and more theoretical, which is not how it should be. The real strength of the F.O.B. has been multi-modal learning where you can experience what you're learning. We're still able to do some of that in the therapeutic relationship class, but unfortunately there's not time for all that we used to have. But here, let me tell you these subjects. There's a whole piece about framework—I borrowed that term from Nan Narboe—that starts with her article, *Finding the Lines and Curing the Frame*, and she has a little list of do's and don'ts. It's a good article. She draws a hard line in some areas. Are you familiar with that?

BH: Yes, she created a riot at the annual meeting in '84 when she said that Rolfers should never be friends with their clients.

TL: Oh right. But it's useful in the classroom to look at that as a position, a provocative one, get stuff going so we can say, "Well why would she be saying that?" It gets the issues and concerns out on the table. In the class I draw less of a hard line, but it's a good place to start. We start with the value of the Rolfing relationship itself, which is formed by creating safety, by recognizing the difference in authority, power, and control within that relationship. I ask

people to think back about really important moments as a client, times when things really started to work for them and come together. And then we break it down as to what made that work, what made it special. And we do a big list of different qualities or factors. Then we go back and look at them and ask the question, "How does the relationship with your Rolfer rank in importance compared to technique, or any other factor?" It's always upwards of eighty-five percent that are very clearly, primarily relationship issues. Basically, you need to know how to be in a relationship and handle relationships to do this work well.

BH: Right.

TL: We discuss the power and control thing: the accidental or inadvertent ways we disempower our clients, or define their experience for them, those sorts of things. We go into the issues of transference and counter-transference, all that's related to power and control, so that people have an understanding that the feelings that come up for their clients aren't always about the present moment, though they have to be dealt with as kind of current event issues, and to allow the client to explain or work it out if problems come up. And to get the students to start to see that their own history or issues or feelings are going to be a real relevant factor in the relationship too, they're not just neutral.

BH: Right.

TL: We discuss boundary issues, how to allow your client to be separate from you: their pace and rate of change, their own agenda, their own desires, and how to stay separate from them. It's both setting policies and setting limits but also taking care of yourself and not taking on their stuff. Separation is a necessary part of the functioning relationship. We do a

little bit of developmental stuff at the point too. We look at how people develop a sense of connection or separateness and different glitches that happen along the way, in terms of different boundary styles. We get people to look at their own styles of either being toward the rigid end of setting a lot of limits to keep things safe, or being too diffuse and going with whatever happens.

The next subject that comes up is broadly termed "contact." It includes listening, empathy, matching, building rapport. We go through some basic active listening, how to help people tell their story without getting involved in it yourself. The basics of how to let people know that you hear them are needed at this level. Some people come in with those skills naturally, or they've learned them. But some people really don't have the skills and really need them. It's as simple as how to be quiet and let the person talk.

BH: Right. I guess I shouldn't have said 'right' at that moment.

TL: All of this is a challenge to teach as something more than just technique. In terms of the classroom, we break it down to concepts, skills and techniques, but in practice it is much more of a human thing. We try to get enough practical stuff in there so that they get a feel for how to embody it rather than just understand it.

And the last pieces are sex, gender, ethics and emotions. We spend a day on what to do if your client cries, that kind of thing. From the simple how to be there and give them Kleenex, to what if they're spiraling into full blown traumatic re-living, re-enactment kind of thing. And most of what's taught there is how to stay out of their way and keep them company, unless things are spiraling to a point where it's really out of the area of the practitioner's expertise, or where

they endanger themselves. We teach simple, non-invasive ways to help bring people back into contact with the present moment.

Last we teach how to refer, when to refer, and self care. How to get what they need in their learning process, how to get supervision. There's a bunch of articles that I've selected over the years and also a workbook I've written for them to go through and write about both their cognitive learning and personal experience.

BH: I'm relieved to discover that this is an area that's being handled responsibly and comprehensively. This type of training should nip in the bud the kinds of power trips a lot of the older, earlier Rolfers sometimes put on their clients.

TL: That's interesting because the people I see in F.O.B. are already self-selected as people who the process worked for. But I still hear enough of those horror stories that it gets really tiresome. It's getting better though, Bill, it seems, because we used to start all of the classes with a little writing project where the students would write about their Rolfering experiences, what they learned in a positive sense and what they learned in a negative sense. There were questions that asked them about the transference issues without naming them as such; or anything the Rolfer might have done that disappointed or didn't work for them. That exercise gave us a lot of stories and there's been a noticeable decrease in those kind of power trips.

BH: That's good to hear.

TL: Part of it is the changing culture in general, but also I think new Rolfers are less grounded in that tradition of "Ida knows best," and have a little more understanding of our potential to do harm. I'm encouraged too. □