

Facilitating Group Synergy in Healing

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ABSTRACT

What are the possibilities for sound healing through groups, as opposed to one on one interactions between a sound healer and a client? How can a group be more than the sum of its individuals? This paper focuses on research on setting up "the zone" in groups so that is possible, and relating that research to a healing context. It concludes with a proposed class exercise with multiple healers and clients that embodies some of these concepts, and possibilities for further training and research.

INTRODUCTION

Various instructors in our certificate program have referred to the group mind as they lead us through experiences, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Though we have repeatedly experienced it, we have not explicitly focused on it.

The term "group synergy" might be a better term than "group mind". The most moving and healing experiences in the program occurred for me when we had exercises where this was tapped. Can the power of group synergy be made even more accessible for healing? Synergy cannot be forced by conforming to some plan. One way to facilitate synergy is through setting up the conditions allowing it to happen by itself, through the flow experience. A substantial literature exists on getting into flow or "the zone" for individuals [CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, TURNER]. It is also possible for groups to get into the zone together (group flow), as is well known while making music [BENZON, TURNER], and which also occurs in improvisational theater [SAWYER].

The conditions for group flow that are applicable to group sound healing practices will be detailed below as a way to make healing synergy more likely. A proposal will then be made to apply some of these conditions to facilitate flow in a group sound healing session.

EXAMPLES OF GROUP FLOW

What is the flow experience? Turner [TURNER], citing Csikszentmihalyi (the original researcher on flow), says:

[Flow] ... is an interior state of the alignment with action with awareness, so close that the two click together as one, achieving a single overwhelming sensation of joy with the work. It is present when we act with total involvement, when action follows action with no apparent need for intervention our part.

Group flow is present when musicians seem to be reading each other's minds when improvising music, and know exactly what and when to play without any direction. It is present in improvisational theater, where even though there is no pre-determined script, something coherent and entertaining is put together on the spot. All the players are fully engaged in "deep listening" to each other, where they don't plan ahead, and respond to the other players in the moment [SAWYER].

I noticed it in one of our classes in particular, where the entire class was spent with the group healing each individual in turn. After a number of people had taken their turns, a woman was in the center, and all at once the volume of everyone's singing increased. At the same instant she started to cry. I noticed the effect of the synergy on me as well, because I was able to sing with

more compassion embodied in my voice than ever before.

GENERAL CONDITIONS FOR FLOW

How is it possible to set up flow experiences, such as those in the previous section? Flow is more likely if four conditions are met when performing any task [SAWYER].

- 1) The task is neither too difficult nor too easy, causing neither anxiety nor boredom. One's skills are a good match for the task, whether improvising music, theater, or healing.
- 2) There is a clear goal or intention. The intention is the performance in music or theater. The intention is more specific in healing, but can be modified as a result of being in the flow.
- 3) There is immediate feedback throughout the task. In the case of healing, this can be through attention to the client and one's own bodily reactions. It may be possible for more feedback to occur than what we have done so far in class. See the section on the proposed class exercise below.
- 4) There are no distractions and one is able to completely concentrate on the task. In the case of sound healing, a quiet environment is helpful if possible, unless one explicitly works in the distracting sounds into the session.

CONDITIONS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR GROUP FLOW IN HEALING

The previous four conditions are applicable whether in a one-on-one, or group setting. There are a number of conditions to set up flow specifically in a group [SAWYER]. These include:

1) The group as a whole should either have a clear goal (problem solving) or adjust as the process continues to find new goals (problem finding).

In a healing context, there is the possibility for flow through the goals for each phase of a session, from finding the intake questions and potentially guiding the client to clarity about their issue, to coming up with guidelines for the healing, to the healing session itself.

For the healing session, the group can set their intention specifically to the issue that has been identified (problem solving). It may also be the case that the issue is reframed, or new issues are perceived that need further work, as part of the session (problem finding). Finding further problems that are deeper than the client's stated goal may be more likely with multiple synergistic points of view that can arise during flow, which can be discussed after the session.

2) The group should practice "deep listening". They should be fully engaged in what everyone is doing, and not in their heads, anticipating what to do next.

Each person in a healing session pays attention to the client, but should also listen as much as possible to the other healers. Both provide the necessary immediate feedback for flow.

This has similarities to improvisation in music, since obviously in sound healing for much of the time we are utilizing sound and music. As in improvising music, paying attention doesn't necessarily mean paying normal conscious attention. When in flow, we may have such total involvement and listening that we lose "ourselves".

Such total involvement is more likely if everyone is intensely present through both sound and movement, as in Suzanne Sterling's classes. This state may have been arrived at in the healers either before meeting with the client, or if the client is physically able, with the client.

3) The group should have complete concentration on the task at hand.

As in "deep listening", total involvement is required. Multiple things are happening at once, and if concentration is lost, one gets left behind. If that happens, at least the individual's flow is lost, and that may cascade to everyone else.

In sound healing, the necessary concentration can be set up at the beginning of both one-on-one and group sessions with the invocation of sacred space and helpers to guide us, as well as the setting of intent. The combined intent of the group can help make up for the greater complexity of things to attend to in the group healing setting.

4) The group has a shared understanding of what works and doesn't work for them, and how they work together.

Both jazz musicians and improv actors have a large body of knowledge and rules to guide them, and what is effective for them. They have practiced enough together to become familiar with each other. A sound healing group will be more effective if they know each other well, and have similar areas of knowledge. What I'm not aware of, but would not be surprised if they were, are sound healing groups who have practiced together as extensively as musicians, and have worked on knowing what is effective for them.

In addition to these guidelines, there are two that are more specific to sound healing:

1) The group is able to get into a rhythm that makes them more coherent, and more able to get into flow. As Edward Hall says [HALL]:

The power of the rhythmic message within the group is as strong as anything I know. It is one of the basic components in the process of identification, a hidden force that, like gravity, holds groups together.

We are making sound and music not just for the sake of music, but with a goal as a group, for healing. Healing and rhythm are tied together in many cultures, and shared experiences as a group can be key to healing, where individual boundaries are transcended [FRIEDSON].

2) The group should be an embodiment of love [GUSTIN].

"Where there is love, the universe self organizes [WILLIAMSON]." A sound healing group has much more potential than just the sum of their individual egos, or even of their individual fields. A client surrounded by a group of people who know "we are love" [PROGRAM] through their training, love refracted through each of their individual selves and self organizing through everyone's full potential, is likely to be more entrained to love and healing. The lack of flow, and separation [GU], in whatever issue a client may have, is more likely to be healed.

PROPOSED CLASS EXERCISE

Out of the conditions detailed above that are useful for group flow, the proposed exercise focuses on immediate feedback, including the use of rhythm. Immediate feedback is mutual feedback between all the members of the group, and in this case, the clients. Two people with the same issue, for example anxiety prior to a performance or low back problems, are selected to be in the center of the circle.

The clients choose one of the techniques for dealing with stuck emotions, and use that technique to make sounds. In doing so, they also make use of rhythm, and may not be making sound continuously.

The healers together use the combined feedback of the clients to make their own sounds and rhythms to address the issue, not necessarily chosen consciously. Individual healers may be silent at times to accentuate the rhythm, and control other characteristics of the flow such as volume.

The clients incorporate what the healers are doing, and change what they are doing to indicate

whether the healers are making a difference, again not necessarily consciously. The mutual feedback continues for the remainder of the session. It is hypothesized that the situation will evolve from relative chaos to harmony and interlocking rhythms, as in Suzanne Sterling's classes, and that the process will be beneficial to all involved.

CONCLUSION

Sound healers in a group are already doing many of the things that enable them to go into group flow, and thus synergy. These include having a clear goal, deep listening, and in the best cases, being an embodiment of love. A large amount of the training in our class has led up to the group being an embodiment of love (in my opinion, at least). All of the topics covered could be more explicitly trained for, including training in more possibilities for feedback.

Sound healing in a group has a different potential than a one-on-one session with a gifted practitioner who has complete focus and control over the session. Different clients may be drawn more to group or individual sessions. My experience in the class is that a group experience can be intense and healing, beyond the abilities of individual members. Anything that can further how and why that is so, is highly useful.

The possibilities for setting up synergy in group healing have just been touched on in this paper, especially the use of rhythm in a group (books have been written on rhythm and healing [FRIEDSON]). All could be the topics for future research. In the end, all the research will vitally, but only, point to the state where we surrender to the source in healing each other.

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