

Experiential

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SPEAKERS

Dan Short, Dr. Zeig

Dan Short 00:33

Thank you for being here, for sharing with us what you've learned throughout the years studying with Dr. Erickson, doing therapy for so many years, teaching E ricksonian therapists around the world and helping to enlighten us a little bit on this concept of being experiential.

Dr. Zeig 00:50

Sure. And thank you for what you're doing about making these core competencies available to students so that this can be researched and people can use it more efficiently effectively.

Dan Short 01:01

Well, and I'm hoping this will be a resource for Ericksonian therapists and for non Ericksonian therapists. So my first question to you will be imagining someone that knows nothing of Ericksonian therapy, you wanted to explain to them in simple terms, what is being experiential is. What is it?

Dr. Zeig 01:15

Yes. So being experiential is using the implication that is available in communication. So, most communication when you think about it started at a very basic level with animals. So animals communicate by using gestures by using sounds and these communicate a message. The message is intuited, we have developed verbal communication, which allows us to take ideas and make those ideas memorable and useful into the future, which is great for science. But there's some things that can't be communicated directly. You can't communicate to someone to feel loved, to experience responsibility to be motivated, or to be entranced by virtue of giving didactic steps, didactic information.

Dan Short 02:07

So what you're saying is that this means of therapy goes beyond words. And so we're helping people understand things by experiencing them.

Dr. Zeig 02:18

Yeah. Well, there's an informative level to communication. There's an evocative level of communication. Every communication has denotation and connotation. If I say here is a table, that has to mean something to you, does that mean it admire it? Does that mean use it? Does that mean appreciate it? So, we are consistently understanding the implied meaning and

communication. When you supercharge that and you do therapy by being evocative, you are activating the client to realize meaning, which helps the client get a conceptual realization of whatever the target concept is that the therapist has.

Dan Short 03:01

Okay. So I mean, when I'm thinking about experiential in the simplest terms possible, I'm thinking about that the client is going to be doing something. And what you're saying to me is sort of mostly communicational. And so what's the, what's the link between this way of communicating at a subtext level and then this idea of the person doing something?

Dr. Zeig 03:22

Well, doing can be evocative, but also understanding can be evocative. The messages don't have to be behavioral. So it can be evocative to tell someone a story to quote, a line of poetry to say an inspirational quotation that somebody has developed, to use a gesture. Right? Those things have evocative meaning they're signified. They mean something. So when a therapist is empathic and says, well, seems like you're curious, right now. And that's a verbal statement of empathy. But it could be that the therapist communicates empathy by using three dimensional empathy. Seems like you're right now seems like you're right now. Now to me that has evocative power, and more evocative meaning. It's bringing the experiential nature of communication, the evocative nature of communication, stimulating that into play. Now, if we talked about that, in very basic neuroscience terms, which is an exaggeration, we could say that human problems are not located in the medial frontal pre-cortex. They're not located in the cognitive parts of the brain, if so, people would think through their problems. So if we say that problems are more limbically oriented, then using limbic communication, emotional communication. Using

communication that reflects a lower level, seemingly on the phylogenetic tree to activate realizations in, in the limbic center, the emotional social center of the brain, then we are reaching deeper into the brain, possibly the place where problems are located. Okay, so when you're saying further down the phylogenetic tree, you're talking about something that's instinctual, and then you're you're interacting with the person in such a way that certain things that are happening for that person outside of words. And so what you're describing to me is, if I understand it correctly, as being experiential, isn't just about having the client do an exercise or move.. No.

Dan Short 05:42

It's also about the therapist being experiential.

Dr. Zeig 05:46

Right. And, and being experiential - underline. This is a state that the therapist enters. Okay, now I'm being didactic. I'm giving you a series of rules. Now I'm being experiential. I'm giving you some things that will prompt a realization. Now this comes directly from hypnosis, and hypnosis is experiential communication. You don't use hypnosis to give people information. You use hypnosis so that the person has a realization. Now once you start with that you realize that Milton Erickson was a conceptual communicator in an interpersonal situation. He was interested in you realizing the concept. He wasn't interested in giving you information, which he did when he wrote he was a very good writer. If you could read what Erickson wrote about different techniques and different understandings about the research and theories of hypnosis, but in an interpersonal situation, what's the concept that this person needs to realize? The concept can be simple, the concept could be of course I can change. Of course I can.

Dan Short 06:54

Change is possible. Okay. Uh huh. But it to realize, of course, I can change, you can't do that by using an algorithmic formula, any more than you can get somebody to laugh by using an algorithmic formula. If you want somebody to laugh, you give them an experience. You tell them a joke. When you tell them a joke, it's an invitation to laugh. But you can't instruct that. Some things have to just happen. Okay, and so we have there's lots of experiential therapies out there. Gestalt, and Virginia Satir's work and psychodrama, many others. What is it that makes the experiential work of the Ericksonian therapist sort of unique as compared to these others?

Dr. Zeig 07:37

Well, there's an experiential component to every therapy. Cognitive behavior therapy has exercises that people do, where they get an experience of whatever is the target. Yes, yeah, homework assignment or stress inoculation or Albert Ellis giving people assignments to sing because they were shy to sing on the subway, and to go into their shyness, to attack their shyness. But what Erickson did is he took the idea of being experiential, especially from hypnosis and expanded that geometrically. So whereas an experiential component could be something that's tagged on to a cognitive therapy. Erickson would start experientially, which could be demonstrating to the person you can go into a trance. You could go into Erickson, tell him two minutes of what your problem was, and he would immediately start with a trance induction. The idea being this is going to be about experiencing change. It's not going to be about talking about it.

Dan Short 08:42

Right. And that's the important attitude.

Dr. Zeig 08:45

Yeah. We live in an experiential world, and the decorations in this room are meant to evoke realizations in us. Art of comfort, art. All art or poetry is experiential, we... experiential things are in necessity in human life. It's just that in therapy in especially in the medicalized version of therapy, if you have a medical situation, you're doing something that's algorithmic, treating an infection, a bacterial infection, setting the bone, these are done in a very algorithmic way. But if you want somebody to be motivated to take a prescription, you have to do something that's experiential, to help that people to realize their motivation to be healthy.

Dan Short 09:38

Okay. And so as you've trained therapists, for decades or around around the world, and you've seen some people be able to get this, what is it? What is it when a student is able to understand being experiential, when you see them being able to suddenly bring this into their practice?

Dr. Zeig 09:58

Well, what I tried to do to bridge from what students already know, they know music, they know art, they know poetry, they know drama, they know movies. And each of these experiential forms of communication has a grammar. And it just so happens that the grammar of choreography and the grammar of poetry have similarities. So if you build on what it is that you already know, then all you're doing is taking something that you know works, you go to the movies, and not a documentary, but you go to a popular movie because you want to have an experience. You want to feel adventure or romance. And you don't understand the grammar of what the movie maker is doing that will help you to realize that experience, you read a novel, and you don't understand that the novelist is using suspensive sentences, or that the novelist is using compound

sentences with free modifiers and these are things that make the flow of reading the novel seamless, and you're in the world of having the experience of realizing the story. Now, anything that Milton Erickson did, has its counterpart in art. And, and we, as human beings, we need art. Art exercises our heart, art exercises our emotions, art is what brings conceptual realizations to life.

Dan Short 11:29

Okay, and so if I'm listening, hearing correctly, one of the things and someone wanting to pick up the skill and be better at this, you're saying call upon your own life experiences, something that's robust within your world, or maybe that you're passionate about ...

Dr. Zeig 11:45

Yeah, if you do music composition or if you play music, understand what you're doing and bring that into play. I think that Milton Erickson, who didn't go to movies but was very well read, understood how a story teller sets up a story. Now, if you take foreshadowing, in music, the way in which, when you go to a play, and you listen to the overture in a musical, that those themes alert you to themes that you're going to experience later. If you see the way in which a novelist will foreshadow an idea, if you know the way in which a popular composer will set a theme in motion that will be developed strategically. All of these things are in the rubric of being experiential. And these are things that Erickson did. Now, if we take like a very simple example, a very simple story. So Erickson is working with a boy who's a schoolboy, and this school boy is absolutely unmotivated to use the toilet at the school, okay, and he's refusing to do that. Now we could interview the child and explain to the child the necessity of using the toilet and that he's going to create physiological difficulties for himself.

Dan Short 13:12

We could lecture him.

Dr. Zeig 13:13

Exactly. And we'd be right. But I don't think we would be effective. Right. So what did Erickson do? In this particular case, he learned that the boy was interested in astronomy. And so Erickson drew the picture of a rocket, he created a compartment inside. He said, here's where the people would have to be if they want to be explorers of space. Now, if you're in that compartment, you need to share conveniences and by sharing conveniences that gives you the opportunity to explore the worlds that you want to explore. And so you have to know that sharing conveniences is something that's really important and a benefit if you want to reach your future goals. Now, he didn't have to say to that boy, whereas this therefore that.

Dan Short 14:05

Right.

Dr. Zeig 14:05

It was a parallel kind of communication that would elicit a realization of this boy to be motivated to change a habit that was ineffective.

Dan Short 14:16

There was motivation he's going to tap into but as you were saying earlier, there's also, this is gonna be meaningful to the boy when he's talking about astronomy and astronauts, this, this has meaning for the boy. And then he uses these concepts to make sense of what he's needing to figure out in his life.

Dr. Zeig 14:31

Yeah, well, that wouldn't be so different than Beethoven creating a symphony and creating a parallel so that you would feel what it was like to walk through a pasture and enjoy being outdoors. So music is intensely experiential, and yet music takes communication into places in the stratosphere that communication can't possibly reach.

Dan Short 14:58

Yes. Okay. So now where we started with the idea of to be experiential, and to be effective at this, you're tapping into your own life experiences, things that are meaningful to you, things that have had an effect on you. You're bringing that into the therapy and then with what you're describing with this case study, we're looking at utilizing tapping into powerful experiences within the client's life.

Dr. Zeig 15:20

Yes. Let's say that a simple way of starting with that is using metaphor, even preceding using metaphor to use analogies, similes. So what I instruct hypnosis students to do is that whenever they land on a concept, I'd like you to relax, I'd like you to be comfortable, just like and then allow a sim, a simile and analogy to brew and come out of their mouth even though they hadn't preplanned what it would be and to feel themselves shifting into the state of being analogic. Now from there, they could shift into the state of being metaphoric, you're a lion and no longer do you need the bridging concept of you're like, you know when Shakespeare says Juliet is the sun in Romeo and Juliet Romeo. Juliet is the sun. Well, it's not just that simple line. It's Romeo saying what light in yonder window breaks? It's the east, and Juliet is the sun. Now, if you asked 100 people, what did that mean? They might have big differences. It means that she's sweet. It means that she's bright. It means that she's

intelligent. It means she's good with people, but everybody will agree. Oh my gosh, Romeo is infatuated with Juliet, right? So the metaphor works. And if Romeo, if Shakespeare would have said Juliet is like the sun, we would have never remembered the line. But Juliet is the sun, bridging from an analogy or simile to a metaphor. Now once you can practice being metaphoric, being metaphoric, then you're enhancing your state of being evocative and being experiential, then you could practice for another couple of weeks using gestures. And gestures are signified, they signify something. And when you're being empathic, or you're being suggestive in therapy, use a gesture to make the concept come more alive. After that, you could use sounds. After that you could use postures. After that you could use stories. You could use poetry and you can begin to build up your repertoire of feeling yourself slipping into an experiential state. It's as if when I was with Milton Erickson, he was already in that state. And his goal was to find concepts that he could make come alive in me, which would transform me into developing an identity. The concept is the mother of the identity. Okay? Think back for just a second, let's take it into the real world. Every parent wants their child to be responsible.

Dan Short 18:17

Yes, of course.

Dr. Zeig 18:18

Now the adolescent already knows the concept. If you don't know the concept, then teach the idea, okay? Once we know that the person has the idea, they have to have a transition. I can be responsible, suddenly, they get the concept. Now that may happen because they join a sports team, fall in love, get a job, but you need the experience to bridge from the idea to the concept.

Dan Short 18:46

And the concept becomes this thing that's lived into.

Dr. Zeig 18:50

Yes. Yeah you want Amy to love you and you say, you can't explain to Amy why you're lovable. But you are protective, you're passionate, you're interested, you're curious. And all of those things build up. And then Amy feels love, but it's not going to happen because you instruct her about how to get there. So, but in medicine, you may need to use an algorithmic function you may need to explain things to people. And Freud, who was a physician and a biologist, was relying on his medical knowledge to explain why things were the way that they were. But Erickson, who baffled so many people seemed like it was very easy to understand, if you just placed Erickson into the artistic design of being the conceptual communicator. What is the concept I want to communicate? Well, then I have to be experiential, once I can target the concept.

Dan Short 19:57

Something I vaguely remember which may be you remember in full is where Jay Haley was asking Erickson to explain something to him. And Jay had a, Hayley had an expectation that things should turn out this way. And he's like, why is it not turning out this way? Yeah. And Erickson asked him to come out, asked him in what direction do trees grow? And Jay Haley said up, you know, and he asked him to come outside. And there was some palm trees growing crisscross or growing diagonally. Yeah. And then he had nothing else to say about it. He just gave him that experience.

Dr. Zeig 20:28

Yes. Well, I remember it a little bit differently. In the book, Uncommon Therapy, I don't even remember that it was Jay Haley, who identified himself

as the student. Okay. But it was this drama of Erickson. So it's Eric - so Haley saying, well, do you always do this in this kind of case. And Erickson says, well, let's go outside. So they walk outside and Erickson says, Well, what do you see? Well, as you look down the block, what do you see and Haley says well, trees. And Erickson says, Well, that's right. What about the trees? And Erick- and Haley says, Oh, well, all of the trees. They're slanted slightly to the east. And Erickson says, That's right. We'll look more closely. And Haley says, Oh, yeah, well, the one of the trees is slanted to the west. And Erickson says, That's right. For every rule. There's an exception. That's it, but it's getting the experiential realization. Now, Scott Miller talks about deliberate practice. And if you want to improve yourself, you use deliberate practice, which is that you take something that you've learned and you replay it, so December 4 of 1973. I'm in Erickson's office, and he tells me a story. It's a long story, but I'll condense it. He's in New Orleans and he's going to a restaurant and he orders a dozen oysters. And he eats the dozen oysters and when he's finishing, he says to the waiter, bring me another dozen. Then having finished 24 oysters, he orders 36. Now this may be the Guinness Book of Records that is a solitary person eats 36 oysters in the New Orleans restaurant, but he eats 48 and having consumed 48 oysters, he orders 12 more. Now at this time the waiter is cataleptic, he's overwhelmed by the fact that somebody has ordered 60 oysters. So Erickson turns to the waiter and says 60 oysters for 60 birthdays. And I indicate happy birthday, Dr. Erickson because the next day was his birthday. Now he chose a way of communicating to me that was conceptual. And it wasn't didactic. And it wasn't saying tomorrow's my birthday, say happy birthday, Jeff. But what he was doing at that time may have been his own deliberate practice. It may have been a way that he wanted to intrigue me in his evocative experiential method, and it may be like a violinist who was just practicing scales, even though they the violinist, the concert violinist who played scales so many times. So this was Erickson

Dan Short 23:14

Yes.

Dr. Zeig 23:15

It give you another example that I just thought of. I organized the first Erickson Congress. And it's like 1978 1979, perhaps 1979 was when Dr. Erickson died. So it was probably in 1978. And I'm young, and I'm hyper and I want to organize this conference in his honor. I want him to be appreciative of the fact all of these friends are going to come together and it's in the evening and I'm throwing questions at him in my hyper way. And he says, Jeff, and I say, Well, yeah. And he says, Well, you know, it's almost six o'clock, and I said, Well, yeah, of course. And he says, Jeff? Yeah. You know, you know that I grew up on a farm. Yeah, of course. And you know, I love the outdoors. Well, yes, yes, yes. And you know, I have, I'm in a wheelchair and I'm confined to my home. I said, Yeah, yeah, yeah. And he says, you know, my way of getting out of the house is watching animal programs. I say, well yeah, of course. And he says, Well, my animal program goes on at six o'clock. And if I don't get to watch my animal program, I get angry.

Dan Short 24:30

Nope.

Dr. Zeig 24:31

I said, I'm leaving. Now that was so elegant as a way of establishing the boundary. Now I could say to a client, you need to establish boundaries, and I would be right. But when you give the person an experiential orientation in that degree, I have an understanding of establishing boundaries by using a series of strategic steps. That makes a simple idea come alive.

Dan Short 25:02

And as you're making that simple idea come alive in these examples you've given there's there's some play, there's some fun -

Dr. Zeig 25:09

Absolute.

Dan Short 25:10

- in the teaching.

Dr. Zeig 25:11

Yes. Yeah, if it's worth doing it's worth doing playfully.

Dan Short 25:15

An enjoyment of communicating this concept,

Dr. Zeig 25:18

Right.

Dan Short 25:19

Wonderful.

Dr. Zeig 25:19

And for Erickson was an enjoyment in learning how people respond and being delighted that you would respond to the implied meaning in the in the communication.

Dan Short 25:33

So I'm going to take us on a different path so that we can be as informed, as deliberate and as responsible as possible. A tragic story I was told, I believe, by an ethics workshop, where they were talking about Eric- people trying to imitate Erickson, perhaps precisely without having the same skill set or background knowledge and the case being where Erickson had a mother sit on her child to gain physical control to kind of establish herself as the person in charge of the family so that...

Dr. Zeig 26:03

The name of that paper is Identification of a Secure Reality. It's a beautiful title, because this was a child who was terrorizing the neighborhood and was uncontrollable. And Erickson wanted to establish a secure reality for the child.

Dan Short 26:19

And creating that experience of a secure reality. The mother, it was done in a loving way, a safe way, and it worked very nicely. A therapist had read this, wanted to imitate it. Had a mother who was over 200 pounds sit on a very young boy with ribs that weren't strong enough to support her and it killed the child. And so we had a tragic outcome. So is there anything you'd like to say to us or caution us in terms of trying to be experiential but knowing what bounds or limits to work within or what's okay, not okay.

Dr. Zeig 26:49

You need to understand the information that people need to do an intervention. And you need to understand that there's no surgery without an anesthetic. Know that the way that Erickson set up that case was very careful. And he taught the woman how to straddle the boys hips in such a way that the boy wouldn't be able to move now, restraint has been used in many forms of therapy with in schizophrenia patients. Dr. Erickson wrote a paper about how

some schizophrenia patients wanted restraint and did better when they when they had restraint. So, this was a very unusual case. But you know, there's somebody who comes up with a good idea and somebody else who doesn't know how to apply it. That's not the fault of being experiential, nor the fault of Erickson, that's a therapist who was blindly applying a methodology without understanding the steps that were taken in that case, and how that was set up and how it was instructed, and how it, how it was infused with care. You don't do this to as to punish the boy you do this to provide a secure reality,

Dan Short 28:01

One of the things I would think whether it's this case and being able to feel and understand what the person's experience is gonna be at the receiving end. Or if I was talking with a client and I was giving them a story or whatever, that if I have an empathetic understanding and connection to the person, then I'll be able to know is this going to traumatize the person? Is this going to disturb the person, is it too much emotion so that they become flooded and overwhelmed. So we really need this empathetic connection to know what to do and what not to do. Okay, great. Is there anything else that that pops into your mind at this moment that has helped you with being experiential?

Dr. Zeig 28:40

Well all of these things dovetail. Just being experiential is one component of these components that you have very clearly identified. And they all fit together into a synergistic Gestalt. If you're being experiential, you need to be strategic and how to know how to set up and follow through. If you're being experiential, you know how to do utilization. And all these things don't separate themselves out, as they might in an objective study where you're trying to clarify components, the way that they fit together synergistically is very important. There's a beautiful case that just came to mind with a woman

who was dying of cancer. And Dr. Erickson was brought in by her family physician, and they made a home visit. And when Dr. Erickson came in, the woman is chanting don't hurt me. Don't scare me. Don't scare me. Don't hurt me. Don't hurt me. Don't scare me. He called her Kathy. Right now at that moment, if you're going to give the person your business card and say, here's my curriculum vitae, I'm an expert in hypnosis, please be quiet. Let me do a standard induction. You're not going to get very far. So what Erickson did was to be in a utilization state. Experiential. And he started chanting with her, I'm going to hurt you trying to scare you. I'm going to scare you, I'm going to hurt you. I'm going to hurt you. I'm going to scare you. I'm condensing the case, until she said, but I don't want you to scare me. I don't want you to hurt me. And he continued chanting, but I've got to hurt you to help you, I've got to hurt you to help you. And then he suggested to her that she who was in a fetal position on her right side would remember when she turned over from her left side to the right side, and that she would remember all of the details. Now, his induction was to in to intrigued her in the details and experience of the memory of pain.

Dan Short 30:41

Okay,

Dr. Zeig 30:42

Now the memory of pain is divorced from the experience of pain. Now, that is a strategic experiential utilization, where you're bringing together all of these components, and in order to do that you need to develop inside yourself these skill sets. I wrote a book, Psychoaerobics, which is a series of graded exercises that dovetail with some of the components that you are interviewing in the experts and I said, there's some things like learning to ride a bicycle or

learning skiing, that you can't learn through your left hemisphere. You have to learn these from the bottom up.

Dan Short 31:26

Yes.

Dr. Zeig 31:27

And so I said, I created a series of exercises that would help therapists get into a utilization state or the state of being experiential, or the state of acuity or the state of using multiple level communication, strategic processing. And because I think that these things need to be developed in the therapist from the bottom up, and they can't be taught from the top down easily. It's like learning Chinese, which I'm trying to do right now. Which is really difficult because I'm old, and I'm not just absorbing the language like a child would. And the child is an artful, experiential learner, who doesn't have to know that in Chinese you put the time reference early in the sentence compared to English where you might put it at the end of the sentence. In English, you might say, I go to the store today and Chinese you would say today, I go to the store. And I have to think about it. And it's no longer in my procedural memory. So we need to develop some of these skill sets, in graded ways experientially so that the therapist gets into the state of being strategic, utilization, experiential, being hypnotic, etc, etc.

Dan Short 32:45

And then the therapy becomes a lived into experience.

Dr. Zeig 32:48

Absolutely.

Dan Short 32:50

Jeff, thank you very much for sharing with us. Yeah, thank you for what you're doing. A lot to think about here.