

INTRODUCTION

The dead are invisible. They are not absent.
Saint Augustine

I am beginning to believe that we know everything, that all history, including the history of each family, is part of us, such that, when we hear any secret revealed, a secret about a grandfather, or uncle, or a secret about the battle of Dresden in 1945, our lives are made suddenly clearer to us, as the unnatural heaviness of unspoken truth is dispersed. For perhaps we are like stones; our own history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung.

Susan Griffin, 1992, p. 8.

Family dysfunction rolls down from generation to generation, like a fire in the woods, taking down everything in its path until one person in one generation has the courage to turn and face the flames. That person brings peace to their ancestors and spares the children that follow.

Terry Real.

The systemic constellations field includes family constellations, organizational constellations, environmental or nature constellations, and collective including tribal constellations. In this course we will be focusing on the family constellations field and the effects of unresolved ancestral, family and individual issues including the effects of unresolved trauma.

While the focus in this course is on family constellations, the facilitator skills, attitudes and approaches learned here are applicable to the other constellations fields. For those of you who do not wish to facilitate groups or who do not work professionally with people, the course is also an opportunity for personal development and a deeper experiential understanding of the human condition.

The main focus at the beginning of the course is to help participants develop their awareness of their somatic (body-based) intelligence. From my perspective this is essential for knowing and healing our own personal traumas, recognizing unresolved traumas (both personal and systemic) in workshop participants and our individual clients, enhancing our own presence and facilitating a safe environment so as to not retraumatize clients or participants. Our own personal work is essential so that we can stay present with the often intense emotional processes that reveal themselves in the constellations and in the interviews with clients. In addition to the facilitator's intuition and experience, much of the information that arises in a constellation comes through the bodies (sensations, movements, emotions) of the representatives. Indeed, it is estimated that at least 90% of interpersonal communication is nonverbal.

An embodied experience and perspective is essential in learning what we need to feel safe and to support our clients and others to feel safe themselves. We will then be able to see and support “*the transforming power of feeling safe*,” the subtitle of Stephen Porges’ latest book “The Pocket Guide To The Polyvagal Theory”. We also need to be aware of power-over dynamics that can easily infiltrate the facilitator stance, taking space that is not ours or complicitly agreeing with another’s giving way in a power-under stance. Here we will look at the experience of embodied consent and dissent.

As facilitators, both in group situations and in individual sessions, we are faced with many of the traumatic experiences that humans encounter: war, death, murder, massacre, torture, rape, incest, child abuse and neglect, revenge, suicide, racism, and oppression (including colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, nativism) to name some. We need to be able to be present in such situations, without judgment or taking sides and without being traumatized ourselves. In this we also need to know when we are reacting or being traumatized. Being overwhelmed by someone else’s traumatic story is often referred to as ‘vicarious’ trauma. However, as far as our individual nervous systems are concerned, ‘vicarious’ trauma is trauma.

We will be learning about attachment and early developmental injuries, both experientially and intellectually. Understanding the latest neurobiological research in terms of the survival system will be included.

We will be exploring family dynamics (often revealed as ‘being out of order’) that often show up in the constellations process.

There are many ‘layers’ or ‘dimensions’ in the constellations process: individual, family, ancestral, cultural, national, racial/ethnic, immigration, indigenous and spiritual. This course will be a step on the journey of developing facilitator skills to engage with these levels. For those of you who do not intend to facilitate constellations, individually or in groups, this training will provide another ‘lens’ and experience to make sense of yourself and the world, and to facilitate other group processes.

In this training, we will be looking at the effect of the events in our families, including our parents and ancestors, on our successes and failures, our relationships, illnesses and addictions, accidents, and our ability to move forward in life.

There are many influences that we are unconscious of that block the flow of life, personally and in larger systems, that inhibit our ability to move forward. We will explore how unresolved issues in our family systems affect us unconsciously. Personal unresolved trauma and burdensome family dynamics will also be revealed by this constellation system.

The training will provide an experiential understanding of the foundational principles of Bert Hellinger's:

- Orders of Love and Entanglements
- Orders of Helping,
- Levels of Conscience,
- Victim-perpetrator dynamics,
- Fate and destiny,
- Family and relational dynamics including adoption, second relationships, blended families, and parentification,
- Types of feelings, and
- Illness as an expression of ancestral entanglement.

Topics will also include recognition of, and working with, transgenerational, individual and personal:

- Trauma,
- Inhibited grief, and
- Toxic shame (shunning).

Recent advances in attachment and neuroscience will be addressed and include personal awareness of:

- Attachment or bonding ruptures,
- The importance influence of Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory in understanding:
 - The autonomic nervous system in safety (social engagement) and survival states (fight/flight/freeze/fold),
 - Self-, auto- and co-regulation

The course will focus on the development of personal and facilitator skills:

- Cultivating presence, a felt sense and embodied self-awareness;
- Being authentic and respectful of self and others' energetic boundaries;
- Holding the space of self, client, family system, ancestral and participant fields;
- Attending to and developing both global and focused perception;
- Maintaining a stance of 'not-knowing' and of 'not-doing' by holding anxiety and uncertainty, and letting go of a particular outcome;
- Recognizing states of arousal, overwhelm, and disconnection in self and others;
- Attending to personal issues, healing unresolved traumas and releasing ancestral burdens.

The overall process will be one of starting small at the personal/individual level, moving on to small group dynamics and then to large group constellations; and from individual and early traumas to systemic and ancestral entanglements. Learning will be done experientially in small group processes.

The Family and Systemic Constellations process integrates naturally with body-focused modalities. The processes in the Embodied Self-Awareness sessions will be

helpful here including: presence, somatic awareness, boundaries, primary scenario, attachment style, alienated agency, and fragmentation or dysregulation. The Secure Attachment Messages and Alienation Mantras support awareness and healing.

There is now an enormous literature in the Family and Systemic Constellations field. I am recommending four in particular for this course:

Bert Hellinger (2008) *Rising in Love: A Philosophy of Being*.

Dan Booth Cohen (2009) *I Carry Your Heart in My Heart: Family Constellations in Prison*.

Johannes B. Schmidt (2009) *Inner Navigation: Traumahealing and Constellational Process Work as Navigational Tools for the Evolution of Your True Self*.

Jakob R. Schneider (2007) *Family Constellations: Basic Principles and Procedures*.

I am recommending the following four books to increase your understanding of embodied self-awareness and unresolved trauma:

Alan Fogel (2009) *Body Sense: The Science and Practice of Embodied Self-Awareness*.

Peter Levine (2010) *In An Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*.

Peter Levine (2015) *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past*.

Stephen Porges (2017) *The Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory: The Transformative Power of Feeling Safe*.

If you are interested in this way of working and looking at the world, you can gain a great deal by taking workshops and trainings with other facilitators.