Learning • Target Practice

BALL PLAY DEMONSTRATION

(Purpose) To evoke an optimal Learning Environment and demonstrate Target Practice as another way to think of learning.

Demonstrate the 3 aspects of what human's need to thrive: 1. Empathetic Relatedness 2. Competency(success) 3. Autonomy.

1. Hold a Ball (Can you hold it successfully?)
2. Play with the ball and find a few things you can do with it that are easy to do and a few that you can't quite do. (Is there a difference between doing what you can do and what you can't? If so describe it?) note: it can be useful to ask people if they've noticed a difference between something and then ask to describe. A more open ended question like: What did you notice, can feel vague to people or take the group off on another track.)
3.You have a minute to do which ever play you'd like either to the activity you already can do or keep working on the one you are still figuring out.
4. What choice did you make? Why?
Commonly most people choose the one that is unknown, the one that is the act of learning. This activity demonstrates the fun that is learning. Sometimes it is recuperative for people to do the activity that is known. Over all one can experience the ease, energy and delight of learning through this demonstration.

TARGET PRACTICE

Dr. Leon Thurman articulates a useful image for the nature of learning based on neuroscience research. He refers to learning being a matter of taking target practice. When learning a skill you have to go off target to learn the coordinations, synaptic connections, neural pathways that let you learn the skill or hit the target. Mistakes are just human constructs often surrounded with negative connotations. "Don't make a mistake." "Mistakes are bad." Worse yet: "I'm bad because I made a mistake." A "miss take" is what your system has to do to find the target; you have to go off target to learn where the target is. When your system registers "ah that dart went slightly to the left" then your system makes an adjustment, it learns what isn't the target. Your job isn't to say, "Now I'll move my hand to the right." You just need to keep your eye on the bull's-eye and allow your system to learn how to throw the dart and hit it. Your system learns to throw the dart and hit the bull's eye by taking target practice, by going off target.

A LEARNING PROCESS

1) Have a clear intention of what you want to do – a target or bull's eye.

2) You take action, throw the dart. You go for our intention. You do.

3) Assess what you did by asking:

Is what I did what I wanted to do? If 'yes' then you simple carry on.

If 'no' then you get specific, you clarify.

• How close did I come to my target, my intention?

• Specifically what didn't I like and what do I want?

• Clarify and specify the new, revised intention.

THE LEARNING CYCLE

We do it. We assess what we did. We clarify our intention. Do again.

In this way our system is free to learn the conditions and coordination necessary for the desired task.

Step three of the cycle, assessing what you did, is the moment when it easy to get off the learning cycle. Detecting that what I did, wasn't what I wanted is an absolutely necessary aspect of learning. If I do something and it isn't on target but I don't know that it isn't off target I'll just keep doing the off target thing and never learn the coordination for hitting my target. No Learning. If I can recognize that I didn't hit my target and simple refresh and clarify my intention I learn.

Assessment-judgment is NOT the problem. Misunderstanding what the assessment means is the problem. It is extremely important to be able to assess whether or not you did or didn't hit the target. The uncomfortable "gut wrench" feeling commonly associated with missing the target is not a feeling to avoid. It makes perfect sense if your system learned that missing the target meant being wrong and being wrong meant being a less worthy person, (or some variation of this common interpretation of mistake). In this case your "gut wrench" should be outright terror, because your system has making a mistake aligned with being worth-less. Put another way your system has the essential ingredient for learning interpreted as dangerous; mistake equals pouncing tiger. (You may not believe this intellectually but if making a mistake and a gut wrenching feeling go together there is some negative association with not hitting the target.)

If you can stop in the moment and identify you are in one of these learning moment. You can clarify "This gut wrench is just telling me I have something to learn here"; you reinterpret the instantaneous detection of "off" target as a **learning moment** rather than a wrong moment or self worth moment. You are practicing seeing a "mis-take" sensation as a healthy alert signal, like a smoke alarm saying "Hey there's something to here to learn." THIS IS THE FEELING OF A LEARNING MOMENT. It is time to slow down and assess what just happened and clarify my intention and give it another go. As you engage in this 'virtuous circle' you can transform fear of being wrong into joy of learning. As a person meets that moment with clarity and reinterprets the sensation, the sensation will change and ease up. It won't be a gut wrench but a sensation of normal dissatisfaction or simply "This is not what I wanted. What now?"

Intend

Do Assess

Assess Clarify

Clarify Do

Intend

Another trap in learning is wanting to be right or good. Being right or playing "well" as goals don't work well. They are vague targets. There isn't anything specific the system can coordinate around. We need to attach specific criteria to playing "well" if we want a clear intention to aim for and assess. If I say I want to hit the bull's-eye then I have a clear intention. I can assess the result. I want to sing in tune or with feeling or in a particular tempo. These are clear intentions that can be assessed.

EXPLORATION

I invite you to make an experiment that a violinist friend made with this learning as follows. She wanted to see if she could learn a new piece with this approach. She chose a piece to learn. She played it through from beginning to end keeping her intention clearly on the music. She registered when she didn't like what she was hearing. But, she didn't attempt to change the playing directly. She accepted the fact of the quality of her playing whatever it was at that moment. She didn't try to play better than she was playing, or wish she were playing better (a misconception that often got in her way of playing). She returned her attention as often as possible to the music. She did this over a period of time without any expectation of how long it would take her to learn the piece. She wasn't clear she could even learn a piece in this so simple a manor. She was absolutely astounded how quickly she was playing the piece reasonably well. She had been trained to work small section and control all kinds of details.

Instead this process was asking: "If my goal is to play the music, be free to focus on the music, what would happen if I practice that intention from the start?" The key and hardest part for her was to accept the off target sounds. To let herself play exactly the way she was playing, to the degree she knew the music at that moment and allow her system to improve in the time it takes to learn. She let herself 'take the time it takes to learn'. To her surprise playing the piece reasonably well was much faster than she expected. She has been doing this approach with her students for several years now and getting similar results. Of course there are times to work on small sections and in detail. But this whole music learning approach wasn't even an option before. It is another tool for learning and practice that is worth exploring. It useful particularly for people who tend to want it to be perfect before they even know the piece or for people who have strong reactions to making mis-takes. In essence it is an exercise in accepting exactly what is happening as it is happening, not enjoying it but not getting caught in useless resistance.