

Vlado Sav's Expanded Awareness Exercises.

Vlado, who is no more, explored awareness, experience, perception and the senses through theatre and bodywork using a range of techniques and exercises which he shared in workshops at his Dragonja home in Slovenia. He spent some time at the Sanctuary many years ago helping us build on our simple experiential exercises to help open individuals and small groups to the natural world, and to each other. He wrote down a few of these. We share them below, in his own words. This is in tribute to his contribution to environmental education.

My way of working with participants of "nature quest" is based on community life and indoor and outdoor exercises/experiences. Indoor work stresses the search for "nature in participants", leading them to experience their own being. Experiences of their beings is a natural foundation for future meetings with non human beings of nature. For this reason, I place a greater stress during the opening of the workshop, on indoor / interhuman work. The second part of the workshop stress more involved connections with the natural world.
Preliminary work on expanded awareness

Several exercises on expanded audio-visual perception (the addition of touch and smell exercises are also possible):

1. Stick throwing ("open focus" exercise)

- a person looks with open focus and catches sticks from participants, who stand within a semicircle
- throwing sticks in pairs
- throwing sticks in circle
- combination of circle and cross throwing, in rhythm

Note: During this exercise, only the right hand is used; participants should relax and move in rhythm, as in dance; initial counting should change to rhythmic sounds; speed of throwing should increase to natural maximum; in the beginning, before each throw, a stick is beat on the ground, which can be omitted later; minimum 4 and maximum 6 participants in a single working circle, with complementary rhythmic pattern of throwing. (2 throws in circle and 2 in cross, or 3+3).

2. Work on senses of touch and smell

Participants sit on the floor in circle, blindfolded. The guide puts an object in the hands of the first participant. The object should be explored with touch and smell and then passed onto the next person. Objects should be very different from one another and should be given in contrasting order (for instance a piece of rock followed by a bunch of moss or wool, sharp object with soft, dry with wet...) Participants can be solicited to touch object also with face or body.

3. Expanded (audio-visual) awareness (EA) in slow motion ("moving in the speed of an opening flower")

Participants, encircle the guide and establish the state of "expanded awareness". The participants follow the guide in slow motion and in a simple motion (for instance performing one rotation around the axis) in 10 or more minutes. Here, it is important to stress the need of continuous movement with minimum speed, while keeping maximum awareness at all times.

4. MOTIONS

This is a set of about 10 movements in EA, which include basic body stretching (as in surya namaskar or in elementary tai-chi) and include sky, frontal and ground contact. The set is composed of movements in standing and bowing positions and is repeated in three different directions (as "open focus" seeing is limited to only one third of the total circle).

Note: This basic exercise begins with participants standing in a circle and moving with a uniform speed. When movements became fully familiar, participants execute this work in a scattered arrangement at his/her own speed. It is still important for participants to maintain a continuous flow, at same slow speed of movements. This exercise establishes and expands contact with the environment and people. This exercise is suitable to be executed during walks in nature, specifically while pausing at special places along the path. It is a form of basic EA body meditation and is easy to learn.

5. Adaptation of sufi dance in EA

This is a rhythmic movements exercise with four phases. It is accompanied with drum beats. At first we establish the EA. Movements start with four steps forward, palms crossed on the belly; then with four steps backwards with palms crossed on the chest, next, circle four steps in the right direction with hands at the neck with palms open; and finally, circle four steps left with hands reaching for the sky with open palms. And we start again with forward walk and palms on belly.

Note: This is a rhythmic work, starting in normal speed until participants learn the pattern, afterwards it gradually increases to the natural maximum speed. Changes of palms positions should be sharp and executed in the moments of passing from one stepping direction to another. While the legs move in four basic directions (front, back, right, left) the hands execute the movement from down (your body) upwards (to sky). The site for the exercise must be flat and without obstacles, ideally (but not necessarily) with an open view. Movements should be learned so well as to become automatic. In its advanced state, this simple exercise can something near to rapture for the participants.

6. Free moving in EA, in a group ("cloud of dry leaves in a whirlwind")

First, we establish EA state, while standing in circle using specific relaxed standing position and breathing. We then establish a "standing rock" position - in which the body establishes complete immobility with maximum awareness and

relaxation. Next, we use a small impulse to push the axis of the balance of the body. This internal movement automatically increases until it becomes externally visible. The participant begins swaying and then he/she switches to stepping with the feet. The direction of moving remains autonomous, controlled by EA. This is a form of ego passivity or walking "like a puppet", nowhere - everywhere. The participants should keep their bodies relaxed, but erect. The tendency to consciously control the directions of moving is eliminated by the amplification of perception. There should be an equal awareness of perception given to the human and nonhuman surroundings (this is a general rule while working on EA exercises). In the state of "ego (thinking) absence" or EA, we automatically adapt our movements to the common energy of movements created by the group. For example, walking may increase to running or settling down to complete stillness.

Note: As a general rule, any stillness during the work (immobile standing or sitting) does not mean the end of one's work, but rather one "works in place" with awareness, as a car's engine works all the time, in motion or not.

7. A block of FOLLOWING exercises

These exercises on moving in EA are based on:

- first, establish the basic EA psycho physical position before executing any part of this block of exercises
- group follows the guide in mirroring his/her movements and energy and in actions and sounds he/she produces. The way of guiding should be executed in a spontaneous manner.
- leader passes the role of guide to other persons and takes it back according his/her own judgement

- We begin by standing in a circle in the basic EA state, waiting for somebody to manifest their inner spontaneous impulse. All are potential guides and followers; guiding is passed on without pointing or announcing. There can be several guides and movements at the same time. Participants either guide or follow others. Movements can be different, but energetically tuned to one another, the common energy. This way of moving is called the "open action".
- during this phase of work, the guide can direct participants to work in couples (shout: "Couples!"). This means temporary splitting the group in random pairs. This is an action/ reaction work on the basis of EA. Guide should intuitively feel how long the couples maintain their spontaneity and then call them back (shout: "Together!") to create original group.

Note: During this work - and work in general - directions and interventions must be clear and simple. Participants should understand the propositions completely. During any kind of work, long explanations or debate should be avoided. These stimulate the thinking dimension, which should be "put at sleep" during these exercises.

There are times
when your soul promenades
on the surface of your skin.
There are times
when we feed ourselves
from heart to heart.

Basic work in and with the Nature

1. Morning meetings with nature and each other

I practice this exercise twenty minutes after the waking the people up*. It is done every morning of their stay in Dragonja (my working place). As they come a day before, they get already acquainted with technical aspects of EA. On the first morning, I explain to them how to run on the path, with short, light and high stepping. Arms should swing passively, shoulders accentuate the running rhythm. In this sense the participants run in a relaxed state and with awareness not fixed on the ground as usual, but freely roaming on the nature "passing by". During running, they sometimes turn the body left or right, which gives the feeling of "looking by the train window". This form of "travelling" starts with walking, transforms to running and back to walking or even stops. It depends on the guide's movements. On the first morning, I am the guide, then I pass leadership on to the participants. There can also be a proposition of exchanging EA vision with a focused one (for example, one sees the forest, a single flower, and then the forest.)

Before the participants' departure, I explain the "big picture" of the proposal: we will go together to a special place, sit there as long as anyone wishes and return individually. For this reason, the path to the place should be easy to memorize.

(*Waking up time is commonly decided before going to sleep, on the basis of the length of previous evening's work. Orientation (ordinary) time is 7 o'clock. I practice to wake them up with soft music of calimba or jaws harp.)

2. Expeditions in EA

These expeditions follows the preliminary exercises in EA. They are done in silence. Participants follow in a row, not too near to one another, but also without breaking contact with the group. They are told to simply follow the way of moving of the guide and that the individual proposals will be explained on the spot.

The basic way of traveling is as in the "morning exercise".

Additions:

- at special sites, perhaps one with a rich with micro life, the guide slowly (as in slow motion) walks in a bowed position with head near to the ground, with the hands joined on the back, which facilitates this slow way of moving
- they can slowly crawl on four legs through the underbrush
- they lay on the earth and rest (especially during longer expeditions)

- the guide stops the group in a place with trees moving in the wind and proposes that everybody choose a tree and swing while following its movements
- on a larger and rather flat site, without major obstacles, there can be a proposal of choosing a cloud in the sky and walk with its speed and direction. Movements are done with eyes constantly fixed on clouds.
- on a place with great sensory variety (trunks, rock, plants, moss, earth.) the guide can propose to scatter the group in a range of up to 50 m and have them choose their own places or object/s to explore. One can also add the senses of touch and smell. Participants are called back after approximately 15 minutes by an acoustic sound (they should be informed about this signal beforehand).
- the guide stops at places of special sensorial value: deep shadow, river bank with fish, special trees, views...
- the guide proposes fast running in EA, stressing the high lifting of feet

Note: The extension of time for a single experience should be defined by the guide's intuition/feeling of the group, which is also a general rule for all other proposals and changes in a way of moving. Guide should take into consideration the natural exchange of energetic and relaxing proposals in order to keep the attention alive and in order to not exhaust the group. The trips can be demanding, but should be pleasing overall. The guide should have the feeling of the dimension of the group and stop it in such a way, that the chosen site is visible to all. All stops should be preceded by the slowing down of the speed of the walk. It is better to stop for a longer periods, rather than many very short ones, as people need time to merge with the place. Again, the length of the staying in an immobile position should be decided by intuition and body movement information from the group.

3. Traveling with sounds

This is a special form of expedition. Participants are told that they will accompany their form of walking with the sounds of nature. The basic movement is a relaxed walk in AE and at a normal speed. When a sound or an unusual voice enters from the environment (breath of the wind, murmur of a river, sudden stream of voices from animals, birds or insects) - the guide slows down the speed of the walk. When the external stimulation is extreme, the guide slows to full stop. As the stimulus decreases (or after it was absorbed for a while), the walk proceeds. Group is as a sensitive apparatus, responding on external stimuli with a decrease in the speed of moving.

4. Blindfold exercises

In the appropriate place (path) in the forest participants put on blindfolds. They begin with slow walking in a row, feeling the people in front and behind. It is ideally done barefoot, while feeling the path.

Variations:

- the group comes blindfolded to a place where running will begin. The site for running should be a straight path, without obstacles, and with defined borders of

vegetation. Here, the participants take off their blindfolds. One person walks to the far side (50 - 100m) of the path and put the blindfold on and starts to walk and speeds up until he/she is running by the path towards the group. The group stops him/her by shouting "Stop!". No one should touch the runner and the path should be free of obstacles. Of course, the guide should do the first run...

- another possibility is a special blindfold walk on an area of the "mixed feet stimulus": water, sand, mud, sharp stones, grass....

- the guide brings the group to a naturally limited area (valley or hill), have participants put on their blindfolds and carefully lead them through the forest to a place where they start an audio- tactile experience of nature while alone. They are free to walk, lay or sit down... This experience should last at least 45 minutes in order to develop the acoustic perception of the space. People should feel independant, but not completely alone (some 50 m interdistance).

5. Night time forest experiences

Many people have no experiences of the night in the forest, and far less experience this while alone.

This work is done mainly on the good paths and not too deep in the forest. Group slowly proceeds, in AE, toward the forest. As the group moves without light it is essential to move slowly. The former blindfold exercises are helpful. At a certain spot, the guide invites participants to scatter around as far as he/she is able, but without completely loosing contact with the group.

Variation: a small fire is lit and serves as orientation for the scattered group as they come back. There is a sub-variation of the fire proposal in which one participant always stays at the fire and keeps it alive and leaves it when another person takes over the role. Participants can experience the night forest only if they feel secure, so there should be no "push into lonelines". People often proceed farther from fire as they feel more at ease.

On the way back there can be a proposal of individual walking by the path, but participants should know that someone has walked the path before him/her. Additional help can be in the form of small candles put by the side of the path on larger distances. Moonlit nights facilitate these experiences.

Oh, holy times,
when evaporate the names of things,
when World surrounds you,
enters you
and melts you!
Then you walk through Him,
move through Him,
full of Him...