Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 7, Session 3 — 48 minutes

Summary: Russell explains the return to Anabuti as a reading of the whole group, not majority rule. People share discoveries about standing, stories, distance from feeling, critique, and listening for process. He names merging and distancing as traps, then sets a short practice of bringing grounded presence into a situation ahead.

Where we'll be next

[Russell:] I'd like to start by commenting about where we'll be next time. Everybody responded, so we'll clearly be here.

Just a couple of comments about why I wanted to do it this way.

First, I don't subscribe to the common equation, majority rules. I think majority has an important aspect of a totality of a decision. It's one aspect of a totality.

If the majority prefers something, but a number of people are significantly hurt by the thing the majority prefers, then we have to weigh that. That also does not live exclusively. Any decision has that kind of complexity for me.

I also wanted to know — let's say most people wanted Anabuti, as most people do — were there some minuses next to Anabuti? Were there some who were having some kind of difficulty? And I was pleased to see no minuses.

So that gave me further feedback about group mind, and whether there were people I needed to speak to. Are there things we need to do to help it be more harmonious? Could we do it?

I was looking for more than just yes or no, or whether most people agree.

And kind of in relation to Barbara's question from yesterday, I very much wanted to be here again. My bringing it forward was really wanting to honor the possibility that for some people it wasn't the right place. The food's different. Not everybody gets a private room. There were some things that were challenging for some people.

Even though I had this preference, and it would even have cost me money and all like that, it was really important to me that it be taking the pulse of the whole group.

But I'm happy to be here. In how I listen to things, there is a part of me that finds it easier to be at Angela. I get to go home at night.

Linda loves Anabuti, and she totally is happy that we're here. When she came here, she goes, wow, this is really a place to be. But there's a part of her that would never tell me. A part of her that doesn't —

[Participant:] Let's hear more about the first one.

[Russell:] In my experience — and this of course sounds judgmental on a surface level, but it's not meant that way — I enjoy Angela. I might do another training at Angela.

This room is smaller. If we get into a group that's two people more than this, I'd have to move out everything. There is a larger room here. Under there, it's nice. It's just not as open and spacious — a lot of pillars and things. If I had a larger group, I'd consider using it.

So I'm not at all against Angela. It's just, when you get into subtle vibration, we're at a higher level of vibration being here. And that lifts us in a certain way.

Yeah. I don't want to say more about that. You had something?

[Participant:] No, you.

[Russell:] Okay. Please.

[Participant:] It does seem that you're more integrative with us when you're staying here.

[Russell:] Interesting. Okay.

[Participant:] There could be two more of us the next time around.

[Russell:] Yeah. Two more would work in this room, but I had twenty-four in this room. And we are twenty-one. At twenty-four, we just have to organize this. We could do big movement lessons. We just had to be more conscious of where we place things, and not have extra chairs in the room. So I wouldn't go above that. But I'm fine if two more people are here next time.

[Participant:] It's like the energy supports the process you're in, in a very wonderful way.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

[Participant:] I also find, personally, and in my noticing of the influence of the food on me, that I feel very balanced in the eating. I also notice a very curious thing.

Santa Sabina's got great food. IONS has great food. Food that I would get in a restaurant and enjoy in a restaurant. I wouldn't go often to the Anabuti restaurant.

But being here for a retreat, I really enjoy the flavors, and I find I rarely go back for seconds, because I'm already satisfied. And I usually like to get seconds when I'm enjoying a meal. I'll usually go back for a little bit more, but I've noticed that that's rarely happened.

I think it's something in the balance of the food, something in the energy they put into the food. That's my experience.

[Russell:] Actually, it depends which person. The older Indian woman is a small scooper.

[Participant:] Know your scooper.

[Russell:] Yeah. There's an esoteric teaching there somewhere. You gotta know your scooper.

What to carry between

[Russell:] Okay. If we reflect back, let's take a moment to actually switch energies. Drop down a little bit.

And for those who are concerned — I know it's our last day, I know there's leaving energy — I just want to be able to bring to consciousness a couple of things that could be helpful in our in-between. Of course, we'll come back.

Do your best to stay here, or return to feeling yourself on this.

Just reflect. Were there any process surprises or discoveries where you go, oh, that is really important learning for me — in a movement of attention, or a languaging, or some reminder. Something that you would like your inner life to recall, and that you would like to have at your fingertips if you were a partner. I think it might be helpful for someone else.

But just let some of that come to you for a moment.

It's the way learning integrates. We sit. We feel in our body. We give ourselves the words, the feelings about the words, and we're here on the ground. And that can become a learning that gets into your bones. So it becomes part of you, rather than, what was that thing? Let me think of that thing that they said. It comes into you.

So we'll just take another few seconds, and then we'll verbalize some of this.

Okay. Let's bring the attention out. Yeah, please.

[Participant:] The first thing was that you encouraged us to consider other ways of grounding. So I ground standing up, and it was totally different, because I have a lot of issues with my legs and my feet. Stuff I'm working on. And when I would start sitting, they just wouldn't ground. When I was standing, I could do all of it.

[Russell:] Great.

[Participant:] And so that was the first.

[Russell:] Great discovery, yeah.

[Participant:] Not when I came out. Just going in.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] The second thing that happened was, not going into it, I didn't really know where I was going to go. But I think we've done it enough now. Just as the person who's reflecting and listening has their own style, I was really starting to feel I have to have my own style of focusing. Because the other style was not working.

So what had happened — I would normally go in, feel, where do I feel something, what's coming up. And lots of times it wouldn't happen. But there was this little message this time. It says, you need to tell that story.

I said, oh, I'm not supposed to tell stories. I'm supposed to get to my felt sense.

No, you need to tell a story.

And so, as I started to tell the first part of the story, all of a sudden it was there.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] When I went there, I couldn't find it. But when I started actually verbalizing a story, boom — the emoting and all this happened. So all of a sudden I felt like I had a little more permission to actually go with my story a little bit, to get where I needed to be, as opposed to writing a story or whatever.

[Russell:] Right. That's great.

[Participant:] The third learning, which I allowed myself to do. I would always end in the focus being very serious — kind of really find what's going on, get in touch with my feelings.

As we moved from the story and really felt the feeling, in this particular case there was a lot of emoting. I was getting very upset, which is not my normal style. And so it was like, I need a Kleenex.

So I stopped and I said, I bet neither of you guys have Kleenexes. Where's a woman when I need her? And I just cracked up. But then I had to go back in again. So it was the same thing again.

There was another thread in the story, and it was like, no, I don't really want to stay here. No, you need to keep going. Go to the next story.

And the way it teased out — as they started teasing that story out, I started feeling good. I don't think that's really happened to me, where I would go from a very intense experience to a very positive experience.

But again, there was this constant thing that said, you need to tell your story. And I think that was the learning for me. I don't have to hold it so far away that it doesn't allow the experience.

Stories as a way in

[Russell:] Yes, yes. And I'm really glad you bring that in, because it sounds like I haven't communicated as well as I would like.

When I say don't get lost in your stories, I'm not at all meaning to imply that we don't use our life situations as entry points.

So many people need to begin a session giving some background. They think they're doing it for the other, but they're actually mobilizing what's living in them about that situation.

So I am really glad you bring that, so I can clarify my own interest. You don't have to go to some sort of blank sheet. We let what's got your concerns, what's living in you —

I'm going to underline again. Focusing doesn't have to be about difficulties. You could be, I want to get more about that wonderful feeling with my grandchild. Let me have more of that, and see if there's more there that wants to be acknowledged. And let me think about my grandchild a little bit, the last time I was holding him, and okay, now I'm ready to look at anything.

So to kind of — not a great expression, but it's like prime the pump, so to speak, to get it going.

I want to make sure we understand what I'm talking about. Not getting lost in stories does not mean that the situations we're living in are unimportant, or that they're not a part of the session. But if your storytelling about your situation starts dominating, you're probably not going to go to a new place. So that I want to say.

Second thing, based on what you said, Bob. As Barbara said the other day, and Karen has said before — because Karen has done this kind of work — there is a style of what's called whole body focusing, Kevin McEvenue, that does standing sessions, letting the body respond in standing, and feeling what comes. And it's beautiful work. So it is possible to do sessions standing.

The second thing I wanted you to have in there is — it's fine.

[Participant:] Thank you.

Right distance

[Participant:] So, the session that I had.

I found a place where I was really drawn into it, an extremely emotional place, and I was crying. And I stayed there. I felt I needed to do that. I really needed to experience just that grief that was there.

And then when I was able to step back, I calmed down. I stopped crying. And I could see the place, and there was a level of detachment between me and this place. And all of that —

[Russell:] Sounds like it's good.

[Participant:] But there was a part of me that said — and I think this is maybe a habitual response — that said, you can't be detached from your emotions. You need those emotions. And when I step back and I can't feel it anymore, it was like there was too much distance.

And that's happened once. When I step back, all of a sudden all that emotion goes away, and I'm like, wait a minute.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] I'm so used to having all that emotion.

[Russell:] Right, right.

[Participant:] Not having it seems almost like there's something wrong here.

[Russell:] Something wrong, yeah. This is really key. Okay, this is really key.

It actually brings back something I wanted to say to Bob also, so this is perfect that you followed there.

This is a learning process we're all engaged in, and it will be different for each person, and different for each person each time. But generally, we're cultivating a rather unique and very mobile relationship to our feeling life.

That we can be in touch with our feelings, that they're there, and simultaneously be presence. That is what we're cultivating.

And I would say, for certain situations that you might focus on, it's there right now.

There are two major traps — that's a strong word, but I want to use it — traps that we want to beware of. Or we could call them biases.

One is to think that emotions are important, all-important, or that that's where the solution is. To get through my feelings. To place such a weight on emotional feeling life as if that's the holy grail.

It's not.

Now, being out of touch with that is not helpful. But being in the well, in the water, swimming around without any sense of a presence with you, is likely to be either — it can be cathartic, but rarely is it transformative.

Cathartic meaning you can change your current energy state, but rarely does it create new behavior.

So that doesn't mean, if something's happened, to be able to really grieve about it. Yes. But there's withness that we could have, right at the same time, so that we don't separate from our feelings in order to be with them.

And that's this chart up here. If this is the feeling life, how close can this be? And maybe this even needs to come down and touch the water. But if this gets pulled into the water, it's okay. It's not like something bad is happening. And maybe even important, once in a while, to be in here.

But most psychology — most cathartic psychology, most post-seventies psychology — not most. There's plenty of schools that don't. But there's been a lot of attitude that getting into your emotions is where it's at. Because we were so, as a culture, emphasizing being rational, being divorced from love, that feelings by themselves don't lead to wisdom.

Let me just run this down for one second.

So Bob, I know for you, sometimes I could hear it in some of your comments when you were guiding Tom the other day. The temptation is not a bad thing, but I could hear you say a number of times, get into that feeling, go back to that feeling.

This work is not about being in your feelings. But it's not about pushing away your feelings. It's a different relationship to your feelings.

So if there isn't an I and a feeling, an I and a something — and the something is not only feeling, but it has feeling. If the I is lost, sometimes you need to just be in it. I don't want us to give the message that that's bad, or you're not doing it right. But for it to become the kind of transformative, focusing-type process, most of the time you're navigating right distance.

Not so far that you can't feel it. Not so close that you can't be with it.

And a partner can help you navigate that territory. Because when you get in the soup of it, especially if that's familiar and you're used to doing that, then you're learning there as well. How can I step out a little bit? Because right now, when you step out, you cut off.

So you know how to be in, or away from, and you're navigating this territory. Yeah?

Does this all make sense to everybody? And this is true for all of us. We're learning how to work with this. That's part of why we spend so much time cultivating our presence. Can I have this available without doing the cutoff?

So one edge, one trap, is the trap of distancing. The other trap is merging.

When the consciousness merges with the temporary state, it's rarely transformative. When the consciousness distances from the temporary state, it's rarely transformative.

Yeah, go ahead.

Meeting it fresh

[Participant:] My experience yesterday was that two different images from other focusing sessions reappeared. So when I saw it, I thought, oh, I know what that is. Do I believe that when I look at it and I know what it is, or do I go, oh, wait a minute?

[Russell:] Well, you want my opinion?

I say, first thing I do is a little moment of celebrating, that my inner life is so alive and that it's bringing back something. It's like if I have a recurrent dream image, I know there's some juice here. There's some congruency in my inner working. So a little moment to say, oh, thank you.

Now, I don't want to assume I know its meaning, because its meaning might have shifted from all that's happened in my life since it came last time. It may have some of what it had last time, but other aspects.

So I don't want to impose — just like I hope I don't do with every person I meet — impose my old box on them. And it takes a lot of consciousness not to, especially with those we're closest with.

To let each other out of the boxes that we're carrying around for each other, and especially the closest ones. That's an act of love. That's an act of love. To meet it fresh.

[Participant:] Thank you.

[Russell:] Yes, yes, yes.

Knowing the difference

[Participant:] It's continuing on this — distancing and merging.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And I think for me, I have a lot of questions about this, and I sit with it a lot.

In looking at my process over time, I would say the value for me of distancing and merging is just being able to distinguish the difference, when I am and when I'm not. And knowing that so well that I can begin to recognize —

It's not just recognizing it in me, but it's actually recognizing. And there's something about a softening to that, that happens here, and in general.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah.

This recognizing of merging and distancing, in ourselves and in others and in larger situations, is key, isn't it?

How we looked at the work

[Participant:] To switch tracks a little bit. I wanted to say something about the overall process of working in threes, and critique — basically criticizing, in the best sense, the process in a group — and how meaningful it was for that to be done with the three of us, with so much respect.

It can be very challenging to focus that lens on one's process, both as a listener and as a focuser. And my experience with my two coworkers was just so positive, in terms of their support, their

criticism, which was so on target, and the gentle respect with which it was offered and with which we shared.

It really was a model of how to — I hate the word criticize, because it carries the negative, you know, but —

[Russell:] Critique.

[Participant:] Critique, yeah. How to critique a process. It was really perfect. And that was a lesson. It really was.

So, thank you again to my little cohort.

[Participant:] I would like to just add a process piece. The general realizing how much I'm habituated to listening for content instead of process.

And wow, I really have a whole new world, and a way of listening. I want to start with me, and see if I can, a couple of times, instead of getting caught up in the content, shift and just see what's happening. In fact, I'd like to be able to notice that.

So I feel like I'm a real beginner. I've done a lot of listening, but I want to see what opens as I — because I was just realizing where my attention goes. And the kind of feedback I would give, which was more automatically about the content, instead of the pauses. Even just laughter, or tears. Just noticing the expression without attaching it to any meaning.

So anyway, I'm excited.

[Russell:] New way of reading the world.

[Participant:] So anyway.

[Russell:] Yeah. Me too.

Being qualities

[Participant:] Just wanted to share something that feels like it would help my inner life to hear again. I loved your — I think two pointings. One about Jean saying, when the positive quality comes up, like, that's so — both in partnership with others, or in my own life. Just that reminder that it's okay to marinate in that.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Let's marinate in that.

Really. We are so willing to marinate in our problems. But boy, you'll get so much more life in your body if you're willing to give at least equal, if not more, marination to the gift.

Learn how to celebrate the little moments.

[Participant:] And the other piece of that was that conversation we had about being qualities. To let go of what felt clunky about, again, making it a noticing of something. To not make it an object, but recognize when it was — I liked that word, being qualities.

[Russell:] Being qualities, yes. Just to let that be there. Yeah.

I want to piggyback on that. It's very different, but related.

I wonder if anyone could feel, in the moment of walking this morning — I invited you at a moment to pause, and to feel. Just giving yourself fully to one moment. Could you sense some kind of opening?

My experience, it's almost like timelessness is a quality of being. Like if being were water, timelessness is wetness. It's a quality so intrinsic to what that is, that it's inseparable from it.

And for us, it begins in very brief moments, and then it begins to become a practice of brief moments frequently. And then you begin to experience this quality within your timely world. That timelessness is the substrate, just like silence is behind the sound, or beingness is the substrate.

But it's similar to what you're saying. It's like resting in that, that that's there. You might have a busy mind, and your knee might be hurting, and even for two seconds, or one second, could you —

For me, it usually opens easiest with the exhale. And I'm not — it's not. It's just exactly what it is.

And if your mind comes rushing back in, that doesn't matter.

That's a totally different level, where we're needing to reinforce our experience of beingness many times a day, because most of us are so seduced by the content of our moments.

And that's exactly the shift we're talking about. Moving from identifying primarily with the temporal historical self, to a larger ground of self-identity that includes and welcomes all the arisings of the temporal historical self.

I know I keep repeating that, but we need to hear it many times for it to penetrate. And then to be living it out in the car, and at work, and stuff.

As much gained by being together

[Participant:] Focusing — I'd never tried it. Each time, when we debriefed, the derivation. How much it is a transgression into concept, meaning it wasn't just about process. Because the languaging of the process went into the feelings that were there.

[Russell:] Sure.

[Participant:] And in each case, the group, the triad, whether the feelings were consonant or dissonant, there was such a container of respect for each person's soul.

[Russell:] Oh, that touches my heart, yeah.

That's as much gained just through being there together. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I really resonate with the resonating that was occurring.

[Participant:] Yesterday when I was focusing, I was really marinating in the goodness, and I felt so alive when I was hearing, just be with that, just stay with that.

And I said to myself, what would that really be like if I stayed with that? And I was experimenting with allowing. And when I kept allowing, I kept expanding.

And I said, well, I've never — wow, do I deserve to have that? Yeah, I do.

So I tried to let in a little bit more, and I was allowing even more. And it felt so good that I kept allowing even more. And it was like golden. The acceptance of that, and allowing.

Coming toward the end

[Participant:] In our trio yesterday, I was the listener, and I kind of lost track of time. So towards the end, I didn't want to say you have two more minutes, because it was really — and so I said, sense if this would be a good time to stop.

And all of a sudden it was like I had shut the door.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And Bruno said to me, you know, that won't stop. Does this work for you?

[Russell:] Yeah. Oh, good. Yeah.

[Participant:] So I was trying to think of something afterwards, a more appropriate way of handling it.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And I think, sense in your body if this would be a good time to end the session. I have no idea.

[Russell:] Yeah. Okay.

[Participant:] It sounds fake.

[Russell:] Yeah. Okay.

I would say it's also — even if you're over time, the point of the two or three minutes is not two or three minutes. The point is, our organism needs to prepare itself for transition.

So that's a really good feedback. Stop is too abrupt. Or even the way you said it the second time, it's asking something to happen immediately. And our inner life feels thwarted often in that kind of way, so it closes.

So something more like, we're coming towards the end of time. So feel how it would feel just right to be ending, over the next minutes.

We're coming toward — toward is a feeling that you can move. Stop is a feeling you can't move. Right? So can you get the feeling difference? That's important.

So you've got a little more time. Just feel how would be the best way to feel complete in all of this.

And it's such a nice invitation. Feel the best way — not just feel, come to completion.

You hear me do this sometimes, and it's not meant really as a — I'm not saying this as a manipulation at all, but as an invitation. You'll hear me say sometimes, when we're doing a movement lesson, and when you feel satisfied, you can stop a movement. If you're still getting value, do it a little bit longer.

So what you're sorting for is satisfaction. It's so different from, when you feel tired of the movement. When you're sick of the movement. When you're tired.

But do you see what an indicator that is? How we sort for what's living in us, by how we're languaging it. And how we do that with each other.

That's why we really, without at all denying challenging moments, want to realize how, in our language, in our therapeutic culture, we can so easily sort for what's wrong, and give little space and celebration to what's really lovely.

And that's not good ecology.

[Participant:] I love that image. The end doesn't — almost like soft, and soft.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] Yeah, it just felt so nice.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] Soft process.

Calling the resource

[Russell:] So I think we should do a little process.

I have a picture that I wanted to bring to you, but I think it's too many words already. Okay, maybe we'll get to that later. We'll see.

So this is a relatively short process with a partner, approximately ten minutes.

You start with whatever — a minute or so, a minute or two — to bring you into grounded, centered presence. Do it standing. Do it sitting. Do whatever. Use your images. Use your body cues.

And you're inviting some situation you're likely to be in.

Now, what's different from regular focusing, or slightly different, is a difference of emphasis. You're inviting the situation. Let's say you know you're going to be in an office somewhere, or you're going to be talking on the phone to somebody. You're going to invite the situation, but we're not going to spend a lot of time learning from how you get contracted in the situation, as we might in a regular long focusing session.

What you're going to do here is acknowledge. Just acknowledge. Oh, there's a scared voice about that. Oh, there's something kind of tightening in the belly about that. You're just kind of taking an inventory of what goes on when you're creating this situation in your imagination. Yeah?

And so you're getting some of that. But again, you're going in grounded, centered. That takes a couple of minutes. Now you're taking the next couple of minutes to be in the situation, and to feel how that concern is living in you.

The rest of your time, which will be the five minutes or so, will be calling upon your resources. To bring the bodily sense of being in your grounded, centered presence into that situation.

So you're bringing images of yourself in that place, from this. If you lose it — oh, my belly's still getting — okay, I see you, you're getting tight. Would you like to feel — okay, let me call upon my resource. Okay, I got my guy on his horse and he's running. As a breath comes, okay, can I have this?

So you're not forcing it, but you're navigating. Can I invite my body to remember that way of embodying, even with images of this challenging situation? You get it?

So we're not dwelling in what's difficult, but we're not ignoring it. And we are calling in the place in you that already knows how it wants to be.

And that's actually a very nice cue for your partner to give you, maybe from the middle on in the session, or towards the end. Something like, let your body show you how it would like to be in this situation.

It's a very nice cue to give yourself. And then you don't force it. You see how it responds in there.

[Participant:] Is that a segue to feeling your resource, or is that even once you're in your resource?

[Russell:] Yeah, it could be either. Could be either.

Okay, so you're going to navigate. Really try to keep it to ten minutes. If it's twelve, it's okay, but don't make it into a long session. If it gets into a long session, it's going to turn into more of a traditional focusing session. So really keep it more like ten minutes each, okay?

Find a place. Enjoy, potentially, the discovery that's living in you. Imagine that.