

“In what ways is the Pod experience designed to enhance our Integral Facilitator education?”
or

Why am I a Pod Person?

Posted by **Mike Gibson** on May 26, 2015 at 8:53pm

I've taught long enough that sometimes my attention is directed as much towards how a course creates a learning environment as the specific content and experience the course provides. Pods play a significant role in our course. When I asked the question: “In what ways is the Pod experience designed to enhance our Integral Facilitator education?” The response was: “Good question. If you're interested, why not look at it from an Integral Perspective?”

So I did. But, I know that many of you have much more education and experience in applying Integral Theory than I, so I thought I'd post my ideas and see if I get any feedback.

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Superficially, the purpose of the Pod is for a team to create a short document and a 45 minute presentation about a topic of interest to both the Pod members and the broader IF community. More deeply, Pods are a container for experimenting with team-based interpersonal interactions. Importantly, they provide a safe container for the practice of new facilitation skills.

At the highest level the characteristics of my Pod learning experience can be described as:

UL: growing my capacity for self-awareness and other-awareness; perspective taking; emotional/creative/analytic/synthetic thought; shadow; listening; using body as sensor

UR: developing and refining my systems and tools for personal work management(priorities, commitments, time, schedule); communication (written, verbal, non-verbal); listening skills

LL: participating in a collective awareness of culture, intention, conflict; group shadow; polarities; power dynamics

LR: developing skills and tool-sets for working with others in a distributed team environment; group intention; agreements; negotiation; conflict resolution

Looking more closely at each quadrant:

UL: I usually grow when my abilities and limits are challenged. While I've worked in numerous teams, the diversity I experienced in the Pod teams was wonderful in highlighting my limits in being able to take other team member's perspectives. Observing my reactions to my fellow team members brought some aspects of myself out of the shadow. Because of differences in gender, age, culture, native language, geographic location, education, and work experience, I found that I needed to increase my awareness of how I was listening and sensing others in order to avoid making poor assumptions and reaching incorrect conclusions.

Team meetings also provided fertile ground for using my body as an instrument. Since I was in a safe environment that was still challenging, I was more willing to try new things. I could focus on finding out what my body was telling me during interactions without being concerned about losing the thread of the conversation because I was inward directed.

UR: Facilitation of Pod meetings allowed me to practice my intention (embodying presence) and get feedback from my team mates. The team diversity and support allowed me to experiment with more adaptive styles of communication. Before starting the IF program, my plate was fairly full, but I'd found tools and techniques that allowed me to comfortably juggle my various activities. Since the Pods increased my work load and the time I spent in meetings, I found that I needed to relook the strategies and tools I used for: prioritization, time management, and developing clarity in both my intention and what I wanted to contribute to the team.

Since typically I don't work with distributed teams, I needed to both learn the tools for distributed communication and develop the necessary skills (verbal and non-verbal) to communicate effectively using these tools (for both synchronous and asynchronous communication). While we met in virtual space, I learned to pay attention to obtaining sufficient bandwidth to support both audio and video and locating the camera/mic in a fairly quite place.

The Pods provided a venue for me to practice greater personal transparency and vulnerability. They allowed me to experiment with flex-flow leadership.

LL: One great benefit of working in Pods with skilled facilitators was that I found people were more transparent than the usual groups I work with. This greater transparency allowed me to more easily be aware of how the individuals in the group came together to form a team with common intent (similar to how a meeting can coalesce around a common intention).

My experience of co-creation with other individuals within the Pod and with the entire team was enhanced. I believe that the practice of IF skills during Pod meetings allowed me to perceive the *group's* intention, level of commitment, inclusion/exclusion of people.

LR: As team members, we had significant differences not only in the amount of time we had available to work on the Pod project, but also when we could work. So, agreeing upon group collaboration tools supporting both synchronous and asynchronous communication was important. Team members were diverse in how they wanted to approach the project: some wanted early commitment and finish while others liked later commitment and working against a deadline; some wanted upfront planning, others wanted more of a flex-flow project; some took a more masculine approach, others more feminine. All of these differences needed to be navigated as a group. The experience of seeing the collective work with and occasionally converge these differences was very useful in understanding how groups handle similar diversity in meetings and develop a shared perspective.

Tracking the collective trust and energy level of the team was informative. It increased my awareness of both of these key attributes in other meetings and teams I participate in.

So, the Pod projects provide an opportunity to deeply work all quadrants of interacting with other people. I think how the Pod projects were structured enhanced this learning experience. Some of the key attributes of the Pod Project related to my learning that stood out for me:

- Two methods for team formation (LR). In one case, this allowed me to practice pitching an idea and recruiting others to that idea (UR). In the other case, being assigned to a team allowed me to increase awareness and develop my feminine aspects (UL).

- Two Pods. I found being in two different Pods much more beneficial than if I had only participated in one Pod for a longer period of time. Switching Pods gave a "fresh start." (UL) I could learn from the mistakes I'd made in the previous Pod, let it go, and try something better in the next Pod (UR).

- Diversity (LR). While more of a characteristic of the people taking the course, team diversity greatly enhanced my learning. Diversity pushed me to broaden my ability to take different perspectives (UL), attempt to adapt my communication style (UR), and highlighted polarities (LL). By increasing the complexity and richness of interactions, the diversity amplified my ability to perceive my successes and failures (UL).

Diversity was also a great aid in allowing me to develop a better awareness of my shadow (UL) — all I had to do was look at what didn't like in the other person. The greater the diversity of dislikes, the greater chance to uncover my shadow.

- Geographical distribution (LR). Compared to a co-located team, I found facilitating/participating in a distributed team much more challenging (UL). So, this environment pushed an edge in my learning. This is an important learning experience since distributed teams are becoming the norm and the tools for allowing them to interact are still primitive. Because of the primitive tools, the skills developed by an IF are more important than ever.

- Teams. Development of a product provided an easy focus, but the team aspect is what made the exercise really worthwhile. This provided the container in which I was able to practice my new, sometimes awkward, facilitation skills (UL,UR,LL,LR). I've come to see all of my facilitations as having the potential for creating a team — however ephemeral.

- Group development of a product (LR). The research I did in the areas supporting my Pod's work gave me useful knowledge and understanding that I wouldn't have had without this additional work (UL). More importantly, having something concrete to develop that also had a deadline (LR) upped the pressure (LL) and almost guaranteed that people would be willing to express differences in opinion. Thus, providing opportunity to work with and through conflict.

- The product exercised skills in both collaborative research/writing and also collaborative presentation.

- Since all the people on the teams I was on were intelligent, experienced, and skilled, I was challenged to develop a deeper knowledge of power dynamics and leadership.

If you've gotten this far, congratulations on having determination and persistence. What did I not mention that you found valuable in your Pod experience? Would you change any of the quadrant assignments I made? Let me know in the comments.

Also, a challenge. This whole left/right special orientation is somewhat challenging to those of us with a bit of dyslexia. Any suggestions for a memorable non L/R description? (And this from a person who is more visually than verbally oriented...go figure.)