

TEFSI Capacity Building Training

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## **Theme Centered Interaction (TCI): A Frame-Concept for Education for Sustainable Development!?**

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### **1. Welcoming and Raising Awareness of the 4 Factors**

Welcome to my presentation to the topic Theme Centered Interaction (TCI) as a frame-Concept for education for sustainable development!?

I have intentionally placed an exclamation mark and question mark at the end of the title because I am convinced that TCI is a suitable concept for Education for Sustainable Development, but I would also like to discuss this with you.

At the end of my studies 25 years ago I got to know TCI. It inspired me so much that during the time I graduated in TCI, which means that I can officially train in TCI. Since then TCI has also shaped my work in groups and my teaching.

For your first orientation:

TCI is a group leadership method and is called "art of leading" and in teaching context as a method for living learning.

As an introduction to the topic I would like to do a small awareness exercise with you on the question: How am I here and how capable am I of working?

I would like to ask you a few questions and you could maybe answer them for yourself in silence.

How do I feel right now? How is my body doing? Which mood do I have? Which thoughts do I have right now? What is on my mind? Am I receptive and concentrated for the next hour?

Who am I sitting in the room with? Who do I know? Who I don't know? Who do I like to work with? With whom not? Is there someone with whom I have a conflict?

What interests me about the topic "Theme centered Interaction (TCI) as a frame for education for sustainable development? What do I know about the subject?

How beneficial do I find the general conditions here: for example the location. The time. The TEFSI workshop framework, the weather, outside noises?

Thanks for participating in this small awareness exercise.

With this little exercise we have made ourselves aware of the 4 factors that always have an effect when several people work or learn together in a group. These 4 factors that you have just made aware are (Mark on flipchart):

I as a person with my feelings, knowledge and motivation, the task for which we come together, the We, the different people who work together in the group and the framework that is relevant for us as a group, the Globe. For lively and effective working and learning these 4 factors must be taken into account and be in a dynamic balance. This is one core statement of Theme-Centred Interaction. The symbol for this is the triangle in the circle

What I want to do now is to show you, how the theme centered interaction concept can support innovative teaching in the context of education for sustainable development. I would like to do this with the following steps:

1. My Understanding of Education for Sustainable Development
2. The 4 Factor Model of TCI and Dynamic Balancing
3. Goals and Basic principles of the TCI concept
4. Reflection and discussion

## **2. My Understanding of Education for Sustainable Development**

How do we achieve sustainable development in our time of climate change? Who knows the way out of all the catastrophes? Who knows how our world can become more sustainable? Even though there are many concepts and approaches, nobody really knows the way.

Therefore, the path to a sustainable society is a joint social process of searching, learning and shaping.

If we take this sentence seriously, it also has consequences for our teaching. Then we teachers are not the experts who know the way, but we are together with the students in a search, learning and shaping process. This means that teaching is designed in a participatory way, that students can help shape it. TCI is a wonderful concept for participatory teaching. I will explain this in the course of the lecture.

### **Shaping Competence**

For this joint social shaping process, special competences are needed, which de Haan, a German educationalist, calls shaping competence. This is a didactic concept for Education for Sustainable Development. Shaping here means that people do not wait passively for the framework conditions to change but become active and proactive themselves and help shape society. People are able to analyse and evaluate their lives and their environment and then change them so that life and living conditions become better and more sustainable. They are able to act responsibly and to shape the future. Shaping competence comprises 4 areas of competence that people need in order to shape their future responsibly, these are

Systemic thinking; Inter- and transdisciplinary work; Dialogue, cooperation and participation skills; Responsible, independent action

I think I do not need to elaborate further on what is involved here in this circle. Perhaps you are more familiar with the eight core competences of Education for Sustainable Development, which are very similar in content.

The question is, how can this organizational competence be developed in higher education? Which didactic concepts can support this? How can we enable our students to acquire shaping competence?

I would now like to explain how TCI supports the teaching of shaping competence.

## 2. The 4 Factor Model of TCI and Dynamic Balancing

What is TCI?

TCI has its roots in humanistic psychology and was founded by Ruth Cohn as a concept of living learning.

What makes TCI so suitable for sustainable education is its explicit value base, based on humanistic psychology. At the same time, the TCI has a consistently participatory approach.

The aim of TCI is to design work and learning processes in such a way that optimum results can be achieved by taking into account both the common task, the interaction between all those involved, and the individual interests and framework conditions.

A basic element of the TCI is this 4-factor model. It is a wonderful planning and reflection tool for effective and living learning and teaching.

Here I would like to deepen the 4-factor model, a basic element of the TCI.

I don't want to explain the 4-factor-model here, but I want to give you the opportunity to make your own experience with the 4-factor-model as a tool for reflection.

First of all, I ask you to choose a lesson that you can remember well. In which something went particularly well or something did not go well. It should be a lesson and not a whole course. Do you have choose a lesson?

Ok, now I have printed out four protocols: One protocol for each factor:

A I-Protocol, We-Protocol, It-Protocol and Globe-Protocol.

Choose now a factor, you would like to reflect for your: either I – We, It or Globe and answer the questions about this factor for you in silence. Try to remember details as well as possible. What went well in the class and why, what went badly and why. You now have 10 minutes time for this.

If you are ready with one factor, you can choose a second or third one. But it is more important to go deeply in single questions and reflect them then to answer many questions on the surface.

## **Exchange in small groups**

Now form groups of 4 people, so that in every group we find all 4 factors.

What has become clear to me when reflecting on a factor?

How well did I keep this factor in mind in my teaching?

You have 10 min time for this.

## **Plenum:**

What experience have you had with reflection?

What has become clear to me about the 4-factor model?

## **Dynamic Balance**

Probably you will more or less consciously pay attention to these 4 factors in your courses, because without them no teaching works. What is now specific to TCI is the concept of **dynamic balance**. This means that all 4 factors are consciously and systematically taken into account in each course and that different factors are weighted according to the situation and process. For example, I usually structure my lessons in such a way that at the beginning I focus on enabling each individual student to develop a personal relationship to the topic. Then I give an input in terms of content, i.e. the focus is on the it. Then I give the opportunity to discuss the theory in small groups or to deepen it with an example. Here the focus is then on the we. Then there can be another input phase, i.e. again on the id. Finally, there is the question of how to apply what has been learned in the future, i.e. the transfer to the Globe. Sometimes I also take a globe topic at the beginning as an introduction to the topic, e.g. a newspaper article.

## **Disturbances Take Precedence**

If a factor is (**neglected**) **ignored** for too long, there will be **disturbances**. If, for example, a lecture becomes too long, then the students become restless and hold side conversations to establish their individual balance. This is where a lecturer is well advised to deal with this disturbance, for example by taking a break or setting a group task. Disturbances are usually an indicator that something in the balance is not right. If one perceives disturbances as such indicators, they are a valuable help for group leadership and lively, innovative learning. "Disturbances take precedence. Without their solution, growth is prevented or made more difficult ". This is how TCI summarizes the importance of disturbances with the disturbance postulate. If disturbances are ignored, they hinder the development of groups.

## **Chairperson**

One basis for participatory work in groups is the chairperson, as Ruth Cohn calls it. Chairpersonship means that each group member acts responsibly, for himself, for the group and for the world. Ruth Cohn summarizes this with the sentence: "Look inside, look outside and then decide!" This is easier said than done: Often we have no clarity in our own thoughts and feelings about what we want. Nor do we have an overview of what exactly is the best solution for a problem that everyone can live with. TCI offers methods with which the chairperson can be strengthened. These are for example awareness exercises for one's own inner voice, reflection of group processes, analysis of situations with the 4-factor model or the initiation of participative processes. The basic aim of TCI is to strengthen the chairperson of every group member or in university to strengthen the chairperson of the students.

## **Participatory Leadership**

The special thing about the TCI concept is that the leader, the lecturer, is not outside the learning group, but is understood **as part of the group**.

She is in the group, does not stand outside (visualise). She is involved in the group dynamics, with her abilities, emotions and relationships with the individual students. She is at eye level with the students, brings herself in as a person. She is not the expert who stands above the group. Although she has the role of the teacher with a special expertise and thus also a special position in the group. With this role she is nevertheless part of the group. This is called **participatory leadership** in TCI. This also requires a different attitude of the teachers than is normally adopted as professor or teacher. This attitude of participatory leadership can also initiate real participation processes with students.

## **Vision of TCI**

Finally, I would like to present to you the visions of the TCI, what is the goal, what is to be created on the connecting lines between the individual factors.

Between I - and It shall take place education with two perspectives. The first perspective is that the individual participants critically deal with contents and questions. The second perspective is that the students internalize knowledge and skills and make them their own, i.e. learn.

Encounter is created between I and We. This is about communication, listening and authentically getting involved in the group. It is about empathy and making contacts.

Between We and It is the vision to enable cooperation. Cooperation includes experiencing group dynamics with its ups and downs, conflicts and common flow experiences during successful work. Genuine innovative concepts can only emerge when a group manages to think through all perspectives of the participants in an appreciative way and to develop them further together.

Responsibility belongs to the Globe. It is not about taking responsibility for the whole situation and having the feeling that one must be omnipotent. That would be a huge challenge for us. Rather, it is about recognizing where I can realistically take on responsibility and where I

cannot, in other words, where I am partially powerful. It's about both competences in decisions: Saying yes, here I take responsibility and saying no, here I am not responsible, this exceeds my possibilities. I think that in our complex world, especially with regard to sustainability, this is a very important competence for remaining capable of action.

This model illustrates well that **the I and We basis** must be created before a topic can be worked on constructively and innovatively. If there is little trust in a group, standard solutions are usually only created. If you want to work out creative, innovative solutions with students, you first need a good working atmosphere in which everyone can contribute their ideas and these can be discussed and developed further in an appreciative, constructive manner. Then the students can really develop something new.

### **3. The potential of TCI for Education for Sustainable Development**

Finally, I would like to show on a slide how the 4 competencies of the shaping competence can be assigned to the 4 factors. Each factor can be assigned a competence according to its main focus, as you can see here.

#### Conclusion

Thus, TCI can be applied as a framework concept for Education for Sustainable Development. I have illustrated this with this picture: The globe surrounded by the 17 UN sustainability goals. Here I have now placed the triangle in the globe, it fits perfectly: a symbol for TCI as a framework concept for Education for Sustainable Development.

Now I am at the end of my presentation. I hope I could wake up some interest in TCI. If so, I have some literature and links to read on.

We want discuss the TCI-Concept as a framework for education for sustainable development in the Fishbowl after the coffee break.

Before the coffee break we would like to collect the topics you would like to discuss. Where do you agree with the concept and where not? What would you like to discuss?

Thank you for your attention and cooperation. Now you wish you a relaxing coffee break.