

**FINDING GOLD IN YOUR GOLDEN YEARS:
USING PROCESSWORK WITH OLDER ADULTS**

A Final Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of The Requirements For Recognition as a Processwork Diplomate

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ABSTRACT

This educational project describes a six class series developed specifically for older adults. The content included theory, discussion, and experiential exercises to explore the impact of Processwork on individuals facing the challenges of aging. Chronic health problems, diminishing physical and mental abilities, changes in relationships, social isolation, and unexpected transitions are among the many issues that can negatively affect the emotional, social, physical, and spiritual well-being of older adults. The class series, held in March/April 2019, offered a safe space, support, and tools for dealing with these challenges. Processwork was shown to be an effective modality for finding meaning in aging and revealing positive aspects of the later phase of life. The project demonstrates that personal growth can be a life-long endeavor and of interest to many older adults.

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Acknowledgements

It is not possible for me to separate this project from my long-term relationship with Process Work, initiated in 1990 by a *Yoga Journal* interview with Arnold Mindell and continuing with a few workshops and many books and dreams until my more recent intense study, from 2013 to the present. I feel this project is only the last piece in this phase of that on-going relationship.

First, I would like to thank my parents, Donald and Virginia McDonald, who lived with good health for nearly all of their 90+ years, for the incredible genes that have allowed me to function at a high level thus far in my life. I also appreciate the consistency of the love and support that they offered, leaving me full of curiosity, questions and relatively free of inner demons.

There are many in the Processwork Community who deserve my appreciation and gratitude. First, of course, is Arnold Mindell, for coming up with this crazy system of awareness that I have been in love with for so long. Dawn Menken wrestled with me on the floor during my first private session, the perfect introduction for a person as embodied as me; she has continued to be my therapist, mentor, and friend. Ingrid Rose has played every possible role for me in the graduate programs at different times: advisor, supervisor, and therapist, and models “sage-ing and age-ing” for me. Salome Schwarz has been an on-going inspiration with her huge heart and support; many thanks to her for insistence that I not let this project grow too large. Susan Kocen has been the perfect advisor for this project with her wealth of knowledge and experience in gerontology; her depth and sense of humor has been the perfect antidote for my episodes of discouragement during this work.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Topic and Focus

My broad topic area is applying Processwork with older adults. My project focus is using process work methods to find meaning in the challenges of aging.

Product

The completed product is a six-class series for older adults with a contextual essay.

Motivation and Evolution of the Project

The primary impetus for this project has been my own personal journey over the past seven years, as an older person and a student in Processwork programs. In May 2012, my 90-year-old mother passed away and within a few months, my sister and I completed settling her affairs. This ended a five-year period where my primary focus was supporting members of my family of origin in a series of challenges and transitions: my brother's mental health crisis and resulting legal and financial problems, the deaths of my brother and father, moving my mother, and finally the death of my mother. On one hand, I felt a tremendous sense of loss, grief, and exhaustion; on the other, my life was no longer defined and limited by events happening 2,000 miles away, and my future felt open and full of possibility. I was now 63 years old; though depleted by this long stressful period and needing rest, I also had a feeling of being liberated into the next chapter of my life and not knowing what this next phase was going to be.

I have had a long-lasting, but mostly distant, relationship with process work beginning in the early 1990's: several workshops and private sessions in the early years, reading (and sometimes, re-reading) Arnold Mindell's books, and using the paradigm and exercises as components of my inner work. In the fall of 2012, while looking through my mail before bed, I saw a flyer from PWI for the 2013 Winter Intensive. I had an odd thought, "If I look at it now, I

won't be able to sleep," and slid it under the bed ... and completely forgot about it. A couple of weeks later, I found it, read it and knew that this was my next step, that I needed to get away from my usual life, go somewhere unfamiliar, deepen my connection with Process Work, do deep inner work and, by doing so, I would find my new direction. I felt as if I was being guided by my dreaming. I had a tremendous time at the Intensive, with both great fun and deep learning. I assumed I would return to my life in New Mexico, inspired and renewed, maybe apply what I had learned in my work with herbal clients, and possibly return to Portland occasionally for a workshop. During the last week of the Intensive while on lunch break, I decided to go back to PWI early to rest before the afternoon class. Myriam Rahman was giving a presentation about the graduate programs, which I didn't think I had any interest in because they sounded too long, too intense, and, besides, I was too old! I fell asleep lying on the floor as Myriam talked about the MAPW program. As I drifted back into consciousness, the first thought that popped into my head was, "There's no reason I couldn't do this program." I realized that was actually true, that I had the resources and could create the necessary time, and I was very intrigued by the unexpected nature of the thought! I felt a sense of trust in the dream-like quality of this insight, and it gradually evolved into a goal and a plan of enrolling in the MAPW program.

At the same time, there were parts of me that had other things to say about this idea: "It will be too hard and stressful." "You're too old." "Just slow down, relax, and enjoy your life." These arguments were very convincing! Yet when I unfolded my dreams and the messages from my body, they clearly indicated pursuing the more intense study of Process Work. This conflict between the part of me that would love to slow down and take it easy versus the part that wants to push the envelope, learn new things, develop new skills and then use them with others has

periodically re-emerged throughout my participation in both the Master of Arts in Process-Oriented Facilitation and Advanced Certificate programs. Several times, I have felt close to quitting, but always messages from my night-time dreams and my trust in them have kept me going. A few months ago, with the end in sight, the conflict finally dissipated.

Another primary motivation for this project has come through my work with older adults as a yoga teacher, a clinical herbalist in private practice, and as a Processwork facilitator. Combining my work and being with my friends who are about my age, I spend a lot of time with older folks, and several times a month, I hear of someone who has died or been diagnosed with a serious medical condition or is transitioning into a more supportive living situation or is forced to change his/her life in some significant way due to a health issue. This made me realize that I am now OLD and brought me face-to-face with my own vulnerability and mortality and a sense of impermanence. Though my health and vitality are very good, as I watch what is happening to others of similar age, I know my situation could change at any time and without warning. I realized that I was entering a new phase of life: older adulthood; I became intrigued with my own aging process and the subject of aging in general.

Through having so many opportunities to observe and relate to people who were facing the challenges of aging, including their own health problems, diminishing function, the loss of significant others, or having to assume caretaking roles with partners, siblings, friends, or parents (or even needing caretaking themselves), I've been able to watch how they dealt with these challenges. Largely, most were able to do this with great dignity, wisdom, and even humor, and they often discovered new inner resources. In addition, I saw older people (including some of the same ones mentioned above) who have developed new interests, pursued creativity through writing or art, and even started big projects or have taken on new leadership roles. From this, I

learned that older adulthood could be a very dynamic phase of life, a stage of life defined by transitions, some chosen and some not chosen and unwanted. And transitions demand decisions; successful transitions require wise decisions based on deep self-knowledge. For me, one of the most helpful aspects of Processwork has been identifying my Life Myth and understanding this unique organizing principle which underlies each of our lives. Having a sense of my Life Myth (see p.8 for more on this concept) has been invaluable in making major decisions, and it is an important part of my work with clients of all ages.

James Hillman, the archetypal psychologist, provided the final piece that helped coalesce and refine this project. He questioned why human beings live so long, and for so many years with diminished physical and mental function and beyond their productive years. Applying the teleological principle that everything has meaning and purpose, the question, “what is the meaning and purpose of this later stage of life?” arose. His conclusion was that people lived so long because it takes a long time to fully develop one’s “character,” which he defines as “the whole of one’s nature,” and “that particular person you have come to be and already were years ago” (Ziegler, 2000. para 5). Hillman also notes the various common challenges and problems that occur with aging and offers possible meanings related to those issues. In my view, the parallel to Hillman’s *character* as seen through a Processwork lens might be one’s whole self with all one’s parts fully owned and integrated into daily life. In Processwork terms, disturbing experiences, such as body symptoms, consist of an individual’s primary processes and less known secondary information or processes.

Primary processes] are better known and closer to a person’s sense of identity, [and secondary processes] that are farther from a person’s sense of identity... This framework is helpful for discerning which parts of a person’s experience are closer to his everyday sense of himself, and which parts are split off and hold potentially

useful meaning and useful information for his normal identity (Diamond and Jones, 2004, p.20).

In Processwork, rather than assigning meaning to these unwelcome challenges, the processworker would unfold the disturbances to bring out the secondary processes and reveal the meaning underlying them.

Initially, I considered an inner work project where I would use my own experiences and challenges with aging and use the modality of Processwork, particularly Life Myth, to explore my aging journey. In the end, I decided to teach a series of classes on aging and Processwork. I felt that it would be a better learning experience for me and result in broader learning and possible applications for participants and others. Still, in working on this project and paying attention to my experiences, it was still an inner work project on my own aging journey.

Intended Audience

The intended audience includes the Processwork Community, older adults, professionals working with aging populations, and those interested in personal growth in the later stages of life.

Project Goals

One set of goals was primarily about challenging myself in teaching Processwork. I have taught several half-day workshops, but never an on-going series, and I wanted the experience of working with a group of people over an extended time and being able to penetrate more deeply into a subject; a format where students learn something, take it home, digest it and experiment with it. Another teaching goal I had was to find a simple way to introduce and teach Processwork; my experiences as both a student and a teacher has been that Processwork can be confusing and difficult for beginners to wrap their minds around and that it can take awhile

before students can make it useful for themselves. I hoped to make the learning process both clearer and simpler.

I also had some social activist goals. Because mainstream American culture puts such a high value on youth and then marginalizes and pathologizes older people, I wanted to challenge these prevailing attitudes about aging. While acknowledging that older adulthood is a stage of life with many challenges, I also wanted to present the “cup half full,” the positive aspects and advantages of being older. I wanted the students to appreciate how one’s later years are a unique phase of life with its own meaning and purpose. As a facilitator, I wanted to create a nurturing and supportive learning community where people felt safe to talk about whatever their experiences of being their age are, both positive and negative.

Finally, I had several Processwork concepts that I wanted students to both understand and experience. The first is that disturbances contain the key to “finding gold.” Secondly, because health problems and body symptoms are such a common part of older adulthood, I wanted the students to appreciate the wisdom contained in them and to learn some basic skills to work with one’s symptoms. I also wanted to convey the value of irrational and non-consensus reality states of consciousness and how they can be used to find solutions to problems and for personal growth. Finally, I hoped the students could obtain some sense of their unique Life Myths and how it might be used as a guiding force in their lives and a valuable tool for navigating the inevitable transitions that aging brings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the Processwork literature related to aging has emphasized the application of Processwork with regard to individuals who were either dying or in comatose states. There has been little focus directly on later adulthood, Processwork, and personal growth. Arnold Mindell (1994) describes working with the dreams and body symptoms of people in coma. Many of his subjects were in the process of dying, and he finds that, even at the very end of life, people still have processes moving them towards growth, personal development, and learning. He describes people in coma and at the very end of life as “wakeful human beings going through one more meaningful step in their process of individuation” (p.5). By working with comatose patients using Processwork techniques, he finds that, “Many of these patients venture to the heights and depths to find some degree of ecstasy, prophetic insight, and self-knowledge” (p. 5).

Arnold Mindell (2004) combines the perspectives of Process Work, Buddhism, medical science, and quantum physics to focus on physical health. The book contains several chapters on aging, health, and Processwork. In Processwork literature, this seems to be the most complete use of the Processwork paradigm and its tools to examine aging and personal development. In unfolding some of the body symptoms common to aging people, Mindell suggests the possible dreaming, or meaning, at the root of the symptoms. For example, the dreaming process behind thinning and weakening skin could be a weakening of boundaries or sense of self. This book also includes several exercises to uncover the meaning behind some common disturbances experienced by older adults. Mindell (2004) offers unique definitions of aging,

Aging is a collective name for an experience, still essentially unknown, that is trying to enlighten you about your nature!” (p. 170)

A nonconsensual definition of aging is that it is awareness of the growth of the death of who you were. Aging is the death of the marginalizer, the one who was able to ignore the dreaming, little flirts, and sensations. Eventually, the whole of life becomes one of those strange flirts or sensations that can no longer be avoided. (p. 167).

An important goal of this project was to use understanding of Life Myth as a tool for aging people, both to deal with the challenges of aging and to support personal growth. Diamond and Jones (2004) describe the role of Life Myth in Processwork:

Process Work ... is influenced by Jung's concept of the life myth. Jung originally coined the term "life myth" to describe a patterning for long-term personal development. He found that childhood dreams ... revealed an archetypal or mythic pattern for a person's life. ... Mindell extended Jung's work on life myth and childhood dreams by proposing that patterning for a person's life can also be seen in recurrent and long-term experiences, such as chronic symptoms, illness, addictions, and relationship patterns. It ... adds a spiritual dimension to self-exploration by addressing questions such as, "Why am I here?" "What am I meant to learn or do?" "What is my purpose in life?" (p. 148-9).

The book that most inspired this project was *The Force of Character And The Lasting Life* (Hillman, 1999) by the Jungian archetypal psychologist, James Hillman. He questions why humans live so long.

Aging is built into our physiology; yet to our puzzlement, human life extends long beyond fertility and outlasts muscular usefulness and sensory acuteness (p.xiii). He then proposes that, ...character requires the additional years and that the long last of life is forced upon us neither by genes nor by conversational medicine nor by societal collusion. The last years confirm and fulfill character. (ibid).

Hillman (1999) sees character, "...as more than a collection of unique traits or an accumulation of habits, virtues, and vices, but rather as an active force, then character may be the forming principle in a body's aging" (p. 8). He also has a unique perspective on the various health issues and body symptoms commonly experienced by older adults, viewing them as

opportunities for learning and increased self-awareness. He says, “But never would we abandon the aging body as a source of insights. The alterations of the aging body are precisely where wisdom lies. The body remains the teacher” (p. 61). He then suggests some meanings or teaching behind a variety of health issues commonly experienced by older adults, such as memory loss, sleep problems, sagging, and others. For example, he offers a possible meaning for sagging: “the body leads the way down, deepening your character. (p. 71).

There is considerable common ground for the theories of aging found in both Hillman and Mindell theories, probably due to their common roots in Jungian psychology. Both value teleology, the belief that phenomena have purpose and meaning, see human life as a developmental process, and value the great teachings that can come from disturbances. A significant difference is that Hillman is more likely to find meaning through interpretation while Processwork primarily uses experiential methods to allow disturbances to express themselves to reveal their meanings.

Gawande (2014), a physician, examines aging in the present-day United States and compares that to what the elderly face in several other cultures. He presents the various challenges encountered by individuals and their families on a variety of levels, including: medical and physical, psychological, and relational. He focuses on the generally available care and resources for older adults as they decline in capacity and need assistance and concludes that it is often inadequate for the needs of this population. He explores a series of emerging alternative approaches and systems, which much more fully meet the needs of declining older adults, and then advocates for increases in their availability. The result is a grim perspective on the present status of typical elder care in the United States, but an optimistic one on the future potential of new, innovative living situations for older adults.

CHAPTER 3: APPROACH

I decided to teach a series of classes for several reasons. I had previously taught several half-day workshops on Processwork and wanted the experience of teaching a class series focusing on personal growth and building community. As older people inevitably have health issues, processwork offers an excellent paradigm for personal development because of its belief in the wisdom held in body symptoms (Mindell, 1984). Processwork's use of deep democracy, as a foundation for facilitating groups, creates a sense of welcoming inclusivity, community, and safety and is also supportive of personal growth (Mindell, 1992).

“...deep democracy, that special feeling of belief in the inherent importance of all parts of ourselves and all viewpoints in the world around us. ...Deep democracy is our sense that the world is here to help us become our entire selves, and that we are here to help the world become whole.” (p. 5)

I felt that having a group over an extended period of time would enable us to cover more material. I hoped the week between classes would allow people to work on their own with homework assignments to develop their understanding of processwork; also if something elicited questions or wasn't well understood, we would have opportunities to deal with that in subsequent classes.

The classes were held at a yoga studio where I teach yoga classes. I chose the location because it was centrally located, had adequate classrooms, and the studio had a large population of senior students and the ability to market my classes through their email list; also, I am well known and valued there. Having six classes in the series seemed appropriate for the amount of material I wanted to cover. The two-hour class format was mostly dictated by classroom availability. I held the classes on a weekday afternoon, anticipating that seniors would be more amenable to daytime classes than to evening classes.

In the classes, I focused on three different elements:

- **Creating a safe place where participants could share about their experiences and develop a sense of community.** I allowed time at the beginning of each class for questions, sharing about challenges, experiences. Etc. I thought this was important because, often, older adults don't have the opportunity to relate in a supportive environment with peers who have similar experiences. Also, some participants talked about the sense of isolation they sometimes feel, as they grow older.
- **Teaching some of the basics of Processwork.** Rather than teaching theory and methods in a more conventional, linear way, In presenting Processwork, I avoided the use of jargon and introduced it as a set of attitudes and perspectives to view one's self and the world in order to create insights and change, and showed how these attitudes naturally led to techniques for examining life problems and challenges. In Processwork terms, metaskills would be the equivalent term for these overarching attitudes and perspectives (Mindell, 1994). I emphasized that older adulthood was a separate and unique stage of life with it's own challenges, developmental tasks, and opportunities. I felt this was important because mainstream culture in the United States has a largely negative view of aging. Another key attitude presented was that disturbances, such as restless legs and poor memory, could be useful; possibly the symptoms could be the body's attempt to help us learn something about ourselves or see one's self or a situation in a new and different way. This belief originates in Jung's concept of teleology, that dreams and body symptoms can contain purpose and meaning for the individual (Diamond and Sparks, 2004). I felt this was very important because aging can be so full of challenges and problems and, if no meaning or purpose is found in these difficulties, life can become very onerous. I encouraged them to find ways to get out of their "everyday minds"

through movement, expressing with spontaneous drawing, using earth spots, etc. in order to become more fluid and experimental with awareness in order to discover new perspectives (Mindell, 2010). The metaskills of curiosity and having a beginner's mind were emphasized along with not pathologizing ourselves, other people, and situations.

Working with exercises as an experiential way to learn about Processwork and to unfold the meaning of various challenges related to aging. I created exercises for each class that focused on subjects such as body symptoms, dreams, life myth, and fears about the future; in Processwork, these are some of the entry points into disavowed or lesser known parts of an individual (Mindell, 1984). These exercises were designed to be tools that the students could use, either in class or to take home and practice with. I demonstrated the exercises in class by working in the middle with a volunteer while explaining what I was doing and why. I believe that observing a skilled facilitator actually working with someone is one of the best ways to learn about Processwork.

I created a questionnaire that addressed the participants' personal attitudes towards aging and the common challenges that older people face. I administered this survey at the beginning of the first class and after the final class in an attempt to measure the effects of attending the classes. After the final class, I also asked for both general and specific feedback on the value they had derived from participating in the classes and also asked about their wishes for follow-up classes, meeting, and/or workshops.

I made an audio recording of each class. This could allow me to review previous classes for my own learning. Also, when participants were unable to attend a class, I sent them the audio to listen to so that they could be prepared for the next class.

CHAPTER 4: CLASS SERIES

The class series was held at High Desert Yoga, located in an older residential and commercial neighborhood in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We used a spacious yoga classroom with multiple windows and good, natural lighting. We sat in a circle; the majority sat in folding chairs padded with Mexican blankets while two preferred sitting on the floor using bolsters and blankets for comfort and support. I sat in the front and used a whiteboard as a teaching aide. Though the size of the room was an advantage for exercises involving movement, it was not a particularly intimate or aesthetic room.

There were 12 students in the class ranging in age from 58 to 74. Six of the students came from my practice and teaching of Processwork, four were friends, and one was a teacher at the yoga studio. The only participant I hadn't met previously was a student who attended yoga classes at the studio. There were 11 women and one man; all identified as white and two were born outside the United States. Except for the yoga teacher, none were actively working. Considering the ages, it was a generally healthy group; I was not aware of anyone having serious health problems. Overall, the participants seemed to be at least financially secure. The attendance of the group was excellent with only 7 total absences and at least 10 people present at each meeting. The majority of students were quite comfortable with speaking in the group while two or three members were quieter but seemed consistently engaged throughout the series.

In the first class, I was surprised by how quickly the group settled in, the level of comfort and openness that was present in the atmosphere, and by the general sense of optimism. We started with a questionnaire focusing on attitudes and experiences around aging and followed that with a brief inner work. Next were introductions where several participants went surprisingly deep, sharing feelings and even some tears. One member shared that it felt "very

supportive to be with peers and to be able to talk about challenges related to aging.” I then spoke about what had inspired and motivated me to teach the class series, addressed the diversity of different cultural perspectives on aging, gave a brief introduction to Processwork, and followed with an overview of what I hoped to cover in the upcoming classes. After a brief introduction about the value of dreams, I left them with an assignment to observe their dreams and to remember an important childhood dream or experience. In both Jungian and Processwork theory, a dream from early childhood can indicate a person’s life myth. (see Appendix C)

In the second class, we began with some sharing. Then in the teaching portion of the class, I talked about how the Processwork paradigm valued dream work as an opportunity for awareness and growth through bringing awareness to aspects of ourselves that are disavowed or marginalized. I outlined the basics of working with dreams. I demonstrated dream work by working in the middle with one of the participants; the work went well, and it stimulated both discussion and questions. I had hoped to give everyone an opportunity to work on his or her childhood dreams in dyads, but there wasn’t enough time, so I gave them a handout with the exercise for homework. I suggested creating a pipe cleaner sculpture of less familiar aspects in their dreams. This idea was met with great enthusiasm, and the students left with supplies of pipe cleaners. After this class, I realized it was going to be difficult to have enough time in the 2-hour class format for sharing, teaching, and experiential work.

The students arrived for the third class with wonderful pipe cleaners creations of the figures and energies from their childhood dreams, and we had a very lively time as they shared them with the group. As the sharings wound down, I introduced the concept of Life Myth and how unfolding the childhood dream or memory could reveal it. I then introduced the concept of how things that disturb us can provide helpful information for our personal growth and

sometimes can even be transformed into allies. We then worked together to create a list of current disturbances related to aging that group members were experiencing; we added some problems and challenges that people feared might occur in the future. The homework was to pick a disturbance related to aging and to unfold it. Ideally, with more time, I would have either demonstrated the exercise myself or worked in the middle with someone and then done an inner work or dyad.

We began the fourth class with sharing. Some of the participants had success with the homework; others did not. In this class, the sharing portion of the class was somewhat tense as some students talked about wanting their processes to “make sense.” At this point, the group seemed to be divided with the majority wanting to move on with experiential activities and a few wanting to discuss further. I moved the class along by talking about the value of the “unknown,” the value of curiosity, and about being fluid with our levels of awareness (see p. 16) to discover something new. In retrospect, this could have been an opportunity to explore this more deeply and possibly bring in how to use conflict and make it useful. Instead, I introduced symptom work and worked in the middle with a woman on a chronic symptom. The work went well, as the client became the Symptom Maker through movement and physical interaction with me as the facilitator. In Processwork, body symptoms have two aspects: the “symptom maker” and a “symptom receiver.” These are defined as “the energy you suspect/imagine to be causing that symptom and the receiver of that energy or action” (Mindell, 2004, p. 208). The work illustrated the previous discussion quite well as her primary process was quite practical and task-oriented while her less known, secondary process was non-linear and more intuitive and feeling based. The homework for this class was to work on a chronic symptom and to see how it might relate to the childhood dream and life myth.

We started the fifth class with some sharing and questions about working with symptoms. I also asked if there were things we had not covered that they wanted before we finished. There were two requests: looking at isolation as a disturbance and the question, “What’s next?” referring to new possibilities and directions. I promised to address these in the last class. I then talked about the challenges of integrating emerging parts of ourselves and emphasized that the process of change takes time because, in addition to parts of ourselves that want change, we all have parts that oppose change. I introduced the levels of awareness (Consensus Reality, Dreamland, and Essence), which Mindell defines as follows,

“I have been calling the world or space, time, causality—the world we know in everyday life—consensus reality. The Dreamworld, in contrast, is a ... world of subjective experiences, such as dreams, while the essence levels of awareness are nonduality-based experiences that seem to give rise to everything else” (Mindell, 2004, p. 42).

I emphasized the value of becoming more fluid with our consciousness and the importance of spending time outside of our ordinary linear minds and learning to access the Dreamland and Essence levels through means such as movement, connection to nature, and creativity. To illustrate this, I worked in the middle with one of the participants on a chronic body symptom, looking at the symptom from consensus reality, dreamland, and essence levels. This worked splendidly as the woman was very fluid and free with her movement; the work was clear, and she had wonderful insights about her symptom and aspects of her life. For homework, I gave them an exercise on looking at symptoms through the various levels of awareness.

My plan for the final class was to provide a review of the attitudes/metaskills that form the basis of Processwork and then show, how putting these attitudes into action, creates methods for transformational change. Secondly, I wanted to address the two requests from the previous

class by looking at attitudes and methods that would be helpful. Finally, I wanted to wrap up the classes with some integration and a warm, fuzzy inner work. With the “What’s next?” question, I suggested holding the question in mind while opening to dreams and flirts, small sensory experiences which barely cross the threshold of perception (Diamond and Jones, 2004). These experiences can be unfolded and then choices can be made based on what would align with the Life Myth. Instead of limiting the other request to “fears of isolation,” I realized this was not a challenge shared by all members presently so I broadened it to “fears about the future related to aging” to provide wider application and usefulness. I had created an exercise for that and wanted to demonstrate it by working with someone in the middle. A student was “volunteered” by the person next to her but had great difficulty following my facilitation, stayed away from her own experience, and repeatedly tried to explain how and why she suffered from her symptoms and her fears. There was much discomfort and a feeling of pressure in the room, and class members became frustrated and tense as the work went on and on. Finally, I asked her if sometimes friends and family found her to be stubborn and wanting to do things her own way. She laughed and agreed that was often true, and much of the tension in the room released. I encouraged her to be more stubborn and independent. We didn’t have time for the good wrap-up and closing I had imagined. I felt it was an awkward ending to what had been, overall, a very good group and class series.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Contribution to the field

I hope the greatest contribution made by this project is to shift how Processworkers, health professionals, and the general public view older adults, as well as to shift how seniors view themselves and their lives. With infants, children, teenagers, and young adults, the signs of growth and development are obvious, and we have many institutions whose primary purpose is to facilitate their development. But at some point in everyone's life, the physical and mental abilities most valued by our culture begin to decline, the problems related to this decline become the primary focus, and individuals are no longer viewed as changing and evolving beings, i.e., older adulthood is not usually seen as a developmental phase of life, but more as a time of dealing with and enduring increasing problems. Yet concurrent with this decline, for many older people, there can be a seasoning, a deepening and a knowing that was not present earlier in life. Hillman muses, "Memoirs, autobiographies, and the deep investigations of long-term psychoanalysis probably shouldn't be touched before sixty" (Hillman, 1999, p.91).

Older adults need support for their uniqueness, imagination, and spiritual depth to emerge. My experience with older adults leads me to strongly believe that many can be very interested in personal development, taking on new creative projects, and even looking for "my next big thing," as one of the group members stated. Processwork is well suited for this task by providing a map for this journey. Processwork takes problems and transforms them into "gold" through working with difficult body symptoms and dreams, discovering the emerging secondary processes and messages contained in them, and then using these insights to provide direction. Through working with childhood dreams and chronic health issues, the life myth can be revealed, providing a broader context and a "bigger picture" for viewing personal history, life

events and challenges. Understanding one's life myth can also provide guidance in making decisions.

This project also shows how Processwork provides both a theoretical framework for viewing aging and an effective methodology for supporting older adults in their personal growth and in dealing with their problems and challenges. By taking a group of older adults with generally limited knowledge of Process Work and teaching them some fundamentals of the paradigm and facilitating them in applying the techniques to address problems and challenges, the usefulness of Process Work was demonstrated. The positive perspective that Processwork provides for aging can be immensely relieving for older adults. I hope others will be inspired to create groups or classes for older adults and use Processwork to provide support and facilitate personal growth.

Limitations of the project

Because of the small size and lack of diversity in the group, the ability to draw more generalized conclusions about older adults is limited. This group was generally more experienced in self-reflection and personal growth than most people in this demographic group. Possibly working with people from other cultures such as Hispanics or Native Americans would have been quite different due to different family structures, economic situations, or communication patterns. In the local Hispanic community, for example, people are likely to have more extended family and deeper roots in the community and, therefore less isolation and more support than the local white culture, which is mostly transplanted from other places. Having older participants, eighties or older, also might have been quite different; I would expect more profound health problems and issues that might arise from being closer to the end of life.

With the benefit of hindsight, I would have scheduled longer classes, three hours instead of two hours. This was the greatest limiting factor in the class series. It was impossible to adequately address the three basic components (sharing, teaching Processwork, and practice through doing exercises) in the shorter format. As a result, all three were compromised to some degree, and the exercises were often demonstrated and then given as homework; I felt most of the participants would have benefited from more support through doing the exercises in class, either as inner work or in dyads, I under-estimated the need and the amount of time ideal for relating and sharing with their peers and feel, that with more time, sharings and interactions could have been deepened, sharing could have been used more as a vehicle for teaching, and a safer container allowing for more vulnerability could have been created. The time limitation was imposed on the classes by the classroom availability at the yoga center. Otherwise, I would have attempted to negotiate longer classes when the restrictions created by the two-hour class became obvious. I also think it might be helpful to participants to offer a private session for each student so that everyone would have an opportunity to be facilitated and to receive a deeper experience of Process Work.

Results

In spite of the limitations mentioned above, I feel that, overall, the class series was a good experience for the participants and for me. Reflecting on my personal teaching goals of offering an on-going series, I enjoyed working with that format. When I found I was unable to cover everything I had hoped for in an individual class, it was relieving to think that we could do it in a future class. I had fears that students would either not come regularly or drop out along the way, but attendance was very good and everyone attended classes to the end with several commenting that they wished we had more classes. One student commented at the end “We’re just getting

started!” Teaching Processwork as a collection of metaskills (such as beginner’s mind, viewing difficulties and challenges as potential learning opportunities, and the potential value of the unknown) that were already familiar worked well; also, connecting these metaskills with the techniques in the exercises was effective. I felt students got a better sense of Processwork than in classes I had taught previously; they were less confused and able to contribute to the classes. I also was pleased in how well the processes in the middle worked in three out of the four sessions; feedback from the students indicated that was the part of the classes where they learned the most about Processwork and about unfolding dreams and symptoms.

My social activist goals around changing attitudes about aging were met well, though many in the group entered the series already somewhat free of the mainstream culture’s negative views on aging. I realized that viewing disturbances as opportunities for learning and growth is in and of itself a social activist position as it breaks cultural rules that sees disturbances as something to be avoided or eliminated as quickly as possible. In particular, viewing health issues as having potential for learning and not only as negative and a sign of personal failure was very relieving to the group. The group gelled fairly quickly into a supportive and safe space for the participants. In the last class, during the difficult work in the middle, several students were fidgeting in their chairs while looking at each other; I suspect that, had the series gone longer, there may have been some criticisms voiced and conflicts might have developed between people. That could have been interesting, exciting, and possibly allowed the group experience to deepen more; facilitating the group interaction might have been useful.

Two things were mentioned the most in the students’ feedback at the end of the series. The first was how helpful it was to be in a supportive environment with people of similar age and where they could safely talk about what was most important or disturbing. One participant stated

that what was most useful to her was “being with other similar aged peers.” The second was gaining the perspective that disturbances such as health issues, strong feelings, and relationship problems, could be rich opportunities for growth, learning, and change. One participant said, “I like my aging more—it’s trying to teach me!” Another said that the class series “normalized the emotional, physical, and spiritual changes as we age.” Feedback also indicated a greater appreciation of how dreams and our bodies can be sources of wisdom. The value of understanding one’s Life Myth was generally appreciated, with one commenting, “I think how central and important the life myth is to all the process work. I knew it was a starting point but not a continuous part and changing part of the process.” I felt that some of the students who were new to Processwork did not get a firm enough grasp on their personal myth to make it optimally useful. All but three of the students expressed interest in participating in future classes using Process Work to look at aging.

Future Possibilities

Based on my experiences in teaching the class series on Processwork and aging, as well as feedback from the group, I can imagine several ways to follow-up this project. The first is an ongoing group, meeting monthly, to provide support and learning around the challenges of aging. Another is to offer classes on specific subjects of interest to older adults, such as Life Myth, working with health issues, and addressing life transitions. A third possibility would be a weekend workshop on aging, covering similar subjects as in the class series.

Others possibilities would be to facilitate similar groups or classes in locations where older adults congregate or live, such as in community senior centers, assisted-living residencies, or The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of New Mexico, which offers a variety of enriching continuing education classes for older adults.

While working on this project, I could feel that, at times, it wanted to grow into something much larger, possibly into a fuller research project or even a thesis. This would have involved much more reading and research to more thoroughly survey the field of knowledge on aging. With this as a basis, classes could then include a bigger information/educational component. Obviously, this paper would then be much larger and more comprehensive. I decided to contain the size of this project to ensure I was able to complete it.

Personal Learning

- Through doing this project, my confidence as a Processwork teacher and facilitator increased. Previously, I had doubts about my ability to sustain an on-going group.
- My skills in creating exercises improved. I feel one of my learning focuses is around presenting and demonstrating exercises in classes.
- Teach longer classes and plan to do less. Be willing to switch gears and change plans when feedback indicates.
- My awareness of the field in the classes improved during the series. Being able to stop and see/feel what is happening in the group is valuable.
- Rather than presenting Processwork as something new and unique to beginning students, it is more effective to teach it as something that has similarities to what they already know.
- Including private sessions as part of a group class could deepen learning for some students.
- Conflicts and tensions could be used to bring in the deep democracy of both the group and individuals.

In Conclusion

Older Adulthood is a stage of life significantly defined by many disturbances such as

body symptoms, chronic health problems, loss of significant relationships, unexpected transitions, cultural marginalization, and isolation. “There is strong evidence that many older adults feel isolated, and that loneliness is associated with poor health and higher rates of mortality ... The effect of social isolation on health appears to be of a similar magnitude to other risks to health, such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity” (Singer, 2018). Unless meaning can be found in these disturbances, life can become very bleak. Processwork can provide the tools to bring understanding and meaning to these challenges and disturbances for older adults. Also, as people age, their marginalized parts continue to demand that they grow and evolve and, when supported in unfolding disturbances, many older people can take on new projects, pursue new creative outlets, and discover new ways to live their lives.

Personally, doing this project was very useful for me as an older adult. I feel much more congruent with being my age than I did previously and more in touch with my dreaming around aging. I also feel more connected to the Processwork paradigm and more fluid with using its tools around the disturbances encountered with aging. In addition, I feel more confident in my abilities to teach and facilitate older people...as well as not so old people.

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APPENDIX A: PRE- AND POST-CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How is it for you to be the age you are?

I feel great about my age!
 Mostly positive
 Mixed, some good, some bad.
 Mostly negative
 I hate it!

2. When I look back at my life, I feel...

Really good about it!
 Mostly positive about it.
 Pretty mixed.
 Mostly negative.
 Oh my God! What was I thinking?

3. When I look ahead to the future...

I'm really looking forward to it!
 I feel mostly positive.
 I believe it will be mixed between the good and the bad.
 I feel mostly negative.
 I think it's going to be really difficult.

4. Do you believe that various life events have a deeper meaning?

Always
 Most of the time
 Sometimes
 Not usually
 Never

5. Do you think things that disturb your daily life or challenge the way you see yourself might be useful?

--A health problem or body symptom?

Always Most of the time Sometimes Seldom Never

--A Relationship Conflict

Always Most of the time Sometimes Seldom Never

--An accident or mishap

Always Most of the time Sometimes Seldom Never

--Strong or unexpected emotions or feelings

Always Most of the time Sometimes Seldom Never

6. Do you recognize patterns that run through your life, a storyline or life myth?

Definitely! Occasionally Seldom Never

What best describes your attitude towards these patterns?

Very useful Some are good, some are bad I don't like it when they appear!

APPENDIX C: HANDOUT ON LIFE MYTH

Carl Jung originally used the term “life myth” to describe a pattern for life-long personal development. He found that our early childhood nighttime dreams, which were often still remembered into adulthood, could reveal a mythic or archetypal pattern for a person’s life. Similar to an astrological chart, the childhood dream was not a fixed, predetermined path but could provide a picture of tendencies, represented symbolically. Arnold Mindell, the founder of Process Work, expanded Jung’s work and theories on life myth and childhood dreams by proposing that the patterning for one’s life could also be found in a variety of other long-term and recurrent experiences, including:

- Early childhood memories
- Recurring or big dreams
- Chronic body symptoms and health problems
- Long-term/chronic edges and core issues
- Recurring themes, patterns, events, relationship patterns, and moods
- Synchronicities
- Repeating disturbances
- Near-death experiences
- Intergenerational and ancestral legacies
- Cultural conditioning and attitudes

Life myth frames the personal growth journey in an impersonal way, allowing for broader perspectives and new meanings to emerge. A person can work with a life myth consciously and creatively, instead of being unconsciously propelled by it. One’s personal history can be located in the broader context of an archetypal drama, adding a spiritual dimension to self-exploration by addressing such questions as, “What is my purpose in life? Why am I here? What am I meant to learn or do?” Viewing experience as part of a mythic pattern can relieve a sense of failure or stuckness around chronic problems by reminding us of life’s meaning and purpose. Core issues and long-term or recurring problems can seem more or less the same each time they are encountered. Yet each time they come around, they offer the potential for change and growth; as in mythic tales, the dragon does not change, but the hero does.

Understanding one’s life myth can also be helpful in making good choices during major life transitions. Being aligned with our deeper selves and purpose brings a sense of flow and rhythm; being out of alignment can turn life into an exhausting, uphill journey.

APPENDIX D: EXERCISES

Childhood Dream or Memory Exercise

1. Remember a childhood dream or earliest memory.
2. Identify 2-3 parts of the dream.
3. Choose one: which one is the least known, has the most energy, or is the most disturbing or unfamiliar?
4. Unfold it.
 - Imagine what it is like to be that thing.
 - Express it with hand motion. Let other parts of the body express it.
 - Make a quick energy sketch or a pipe cleaner sculpture. Find a word or two, or a name to describe it.
5. Reflect on your experience and what you have learned.

Chronic Symptom Exercise

1. Think of a chronic physical symptom that you can feel or can remember how it felt.
2. Feel or remember the symptom. Allow yourself to enter a dreamy state. What words describe the symptom? Express it with a hand motion; create the symptom on something; or make a drawing of what is happening in your body.
3. What is the most scary, mysterious, or troublesome aspect of it? Amplify that quality: feel it more intensely, let it move you, become the symptom maker and express it in movements or sounds. Let an image of a person or spirit being arise.
4. Experiment with becoming this spirit and move like it. Express its nature in a symbolic gesture. From the perspective of this spirit, look at yourself and give yourself a message or tip. Where in your life might this be useful?
5. What aspect of yourself or what personal or cultural belief system is opposed to it? Do you know a person in real life who can live this spirit in a way that appeals to you?

Exercise: Taking the Childhood Dream Further

1. Divide a blank sheet of paper into 6 boxes.
2. Put 3-4 elements of your dream in the first box.
3. Dream the dream on through sketching and create a comic strip. Do this quickly without much thought.
4. In the final box, sketch a resolution or completion to the dream.
5. How does this resolution inform your life path or life myth?

ACCESSING BODY WISDOM FOR GUIDANCE

1. Think of a problem or question that you have.
2. Sit or stand in a comfortable, stable position. Relax, let your neck soften, and breathe evenly and slowly. Observe and feel your body, scanning it and searching for a slight movement or even just a tendency towards movement. Let that movement occur and expand it a bit. Amplify the movement further; allow it to spread into the whole body.
3. Continue to follow the movement, waiting until you “catch” something unusual and unexpected. This could be an irregularity in the movement, a visual image, a memory, a sound, etc. Amplify and explore it! Whatever this is, assume it has wisdom, something to show or teach you or maybe a quality you need more of. Get to know it!
4. Take this wisdom or quality and see how it might be helpful with your problem or question.

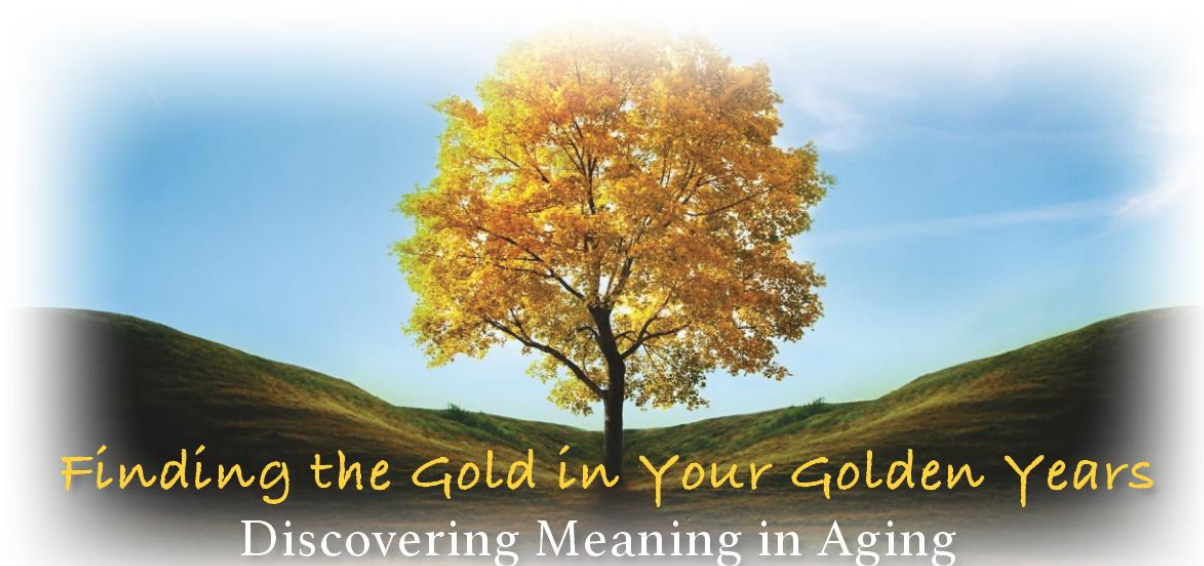
USING EARTH-BASED WISDOM ON STRONG FEARS

1. Think of something you are afraid will happen in the future, possibly something you associate with old age.
2. What is the most disturbing part of this fear? This is the **X energy**. Make a sketch and movement that expresses this energy.
3. What part of you is the most scared and disturbed by the possibility of this happening? This is the **U energy**; Make a sketch and movement that expresses that energy.
4. Think of a place on the Earth where you feel especially well. Go there in your imagination; look around, listen, smell, and feel what it is like to be there. Notice what your breath is like there.
5. Let the energy of this spot begin to move you; move freely in known and unexpected ways.
6. Into your earth dance, bring in the X and U movements and move back and forth between the two until you feel a sense of fluidity between the two states. Keep going until a new dance emerges that is neither one energy nor the other but a combination of both. Be open to any images, memories, sounds, or figures that might pop up.
7. From this state, you can access your deepest wisdom. How might this wisdom/energy advise you to deal with your fear?

Symptom Exercise: Dreamland and Essence

1. *Choose a symptom to work on.* Preferably a symptom that you can feel now or one you felt in the past but never understood.
2. *Focus on the feeling of that symptom.* Make your description so precise that anyone could imagine experiencing it in his/her body. Feel the sensations so exactly that you could recreate it on someone else's body or on an object, like a pillow.
3. *Do not focus only on the effect the symptom has on you.* Imagine the energy creating that symptom; this may seem very irrational. Catch this dreamlike experience.
4. *Unfold the energy behind the symptom by expressing its action with one of your hands.* This movement may lead you into the "symptom maker," the dreamland predecessor to the physical symptom. Explore shape-shifting with your body into the symptom maker and feel and move like it. Take your time and stay with the movement exploration until a visual image, memory or sound emerges.
 What are these movements, images, or sounds expressing? What is their message? What's in the mind of the symptom maker? Because you are working in **Dreamland**, your experience may not make 'sense.'" Believe in your own experience, in your inner reality! Where might this message be useful in your life?
5. *Find the **Essence** of the symptom.* To do this, again shape-shift into the energy or movement of the symptom-maker, and gradually make the movements smaller and smaller until you find the essence: the first urge or the seed that comes before the movement of the symptom-maker. Name the essence of the symptom maker.
6. *Find an image for the essence.* This image may be very different from previous images because you have moved from dreamland into the essence world.
7. *Explore the world of the essence.* What does it feel like to live in this world? What are the time and space of the essence's world like? Live there now!
8. *Express and explore in a variety of ways:* use hand movements, dance-like body movements, sounds, quick sketches, etc. Think of yourself as living art, being created by the essence world. Take your time.
9. *Make it useful.* Ask yourself: How might this experience influence your daily life, your work, your hobbies, how you spend your time, and your relationships. Does it have any advice on how to take care of your body and your symptoms? Might it inform you about how to deal with any of your problems?

APPENDIX E: CLASS FLYER



Do you believe that, despite having been alive many years, you still have important things to do, more to learn? Maybe you even feel that your best years are still ahead. You're not done yet!

Various schools of thought, including western psychology and eastern spirituality, view human life as being divided into phases (infancy, early childhood, adolescence, etc.) that are defined by different primary tasks and developmental focus. In modern times with longer life spans, people might spend as much as several decades in the phase of known as older adulthood.

In this class, we will look at older adulthood as a distinct phase of life with its own meaning and purpose. Questions we will address in this class series include: What is the purpose of your later years? What are the primary developmental tasks of this phase of life? How can you become your full, unique self? We'll explore these questions with Process Work, an awareness-based system developed by Arnold Mindell that combines elements of Jungian Psychology, Taoism, and indigenous wisdom. In Process Work, each individual is seen as having his/her own unique life myth or path; by discovering and following one's life myth, our lives gain meaning and fulfillment, and the world is better for that. Examining our nighttime dreams, exploring health issues and symptoms, and unfolding unusual life events can bring understanding to one's unique myth.

Together we will create community as we engage in deep, playful self-exploration to discover how to best utilize the rest of our lives. The classes will contain experiential exercises, theory, and offer tools for personal growth.

Because each class builds on the previous, registration for the full series is required.



Herb McDonald has had a lifelong fascination with the human body and mind: how they work, ways of enhancing performance, and maximizing a creative and enjoyable human experience. For over 30 years, he has been self-employed as a yoga teacher and clinical herbalist. Over the past decade, his interests have included an emphasis on the relationship between consciousness and the body and health. Herb has recently completed a Masters Degree in Processwork Facilitation.

6 Thursdays
March 7–April 11, 2019
2:00–4:00 PM

\$100 (plus tax) pre-registered by February 21
\$120 (plus tax) after February 21

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