

# Draw Your Breath: Why does this process work?

Dr. Gil Dekel.



For a full description of the process, see: <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/all/?id=20812>

## **Attention widening**

Since breathing produces a flow of 'in and out', which can regulate our thinking and feelings, the method helps participants focus on being receptive while 'de-focusing' from the 'mind-chatter' and judgement. The experience promotes 'concentration without elimination', to use the words of T.S. Eliot (1970: 16). Strong integration can be formed between the body, mind, and intuitive knowledge (Dekel, 2014), in what Maslow (1994: 78) sees as 'attention widening'.

The analytical mind is not removed, rather it is given a new 'role', that of an observer, instead of an analyser or a judge of emotions. A bond is created - a 'marriage' of equal partners - emotional instinct and inquisitive observing mind.

## **Arts – a creative method to embody ideas**

To assist the mind in its observation, and to help it detach from judgment, the method uses art-making, images that are created on paper. It is far easier to absorb images than words since images represent how things look like while words require interpretation as they are symbols/signs to other things.

As the hand, holding the pen, follows the path of breath, tension fades away, and the body relaxes. This helps to inspire participants to move outside of their comfort zone (which inhibits creativity) (Dekel, 2009), and to enter a new space of inner, intuitive truth (Steiner, 1972: 30). Art expands people's horizons (Massie, 2023), and can benefit any researcher since research requires seeing the world "... beyond the ordinary" (Janesick, 2016: 5). Rilke (1950: 25) calls the experience: "You sat there as if dissolved ... you were like a vacant place."

In that 'vacant place' participants can allow emotions and intuitive insights to surface. The process then moves from inner listening to self-observation and then into inquiry (Dekel,

2008). This inquiry is rooted in grounded theory where researchers start their exploration with inductive data based on experience, and only then do they analyse it (Charmaz, 2014: 1).

Participants look at their inner feelings/thoughts, which are visualised through the artwork, and reflect meaningfully, analysing what they see in front of them. Since the art on the paper externalises something which is otherwise hidden, the experience is akin to looking in a mirror, or at a portrait. As such, the method provides participants with a metacognitive tool that magnifies their internal conversation. This allows for personal clarity while maximising representation in research and amplifying participants' voices.

*“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress ... It is, strictly speaking, a real factor in scientific research.”*  
(Einstein, 1931: 97)

### **Ownership – a tool of empowerment**

Participants take ownership of their drawings since it is they who drew the art; and the art reflects on their personal process, not on someone else's process. Participants become the rightful authors of their art, empowered by the actions of revealing a new creative process that was hidden before.

As breathing is an individual activity (Dewey, 1933: 3), there is no judgement involved. No one can judge the works and argue that a work is not 'right'. Both personal judgement and judgement of other peoples' works are removed. This creates a safe inclusive space where everyone is given a voice to express themselves. Such a safe space is beneficial, especially to students with anxieties who otherwise would not participate in class because of fear of criticism. The method also supports students that are visual or kinaesthetic, as the images act as prompts to get the reflective thinking going. This offers an alternative way of thinking critically and exploring.

## Listening – a tool to improve research process

With a sense of ownership/empowerment, and with arts that reflect on their inner processes, participants learn to listen to themselves and connect to their intuitive creative faculty. Listening allows them to access their inner embodied knowledge and to draw insights coming from deep within - from their own experiences. This approach is known as constructivist pedagogy where "... individuals construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world [while] reflecting on their individual experiences" (Reeve, et al., 2021).

The approach helps participants define their own meanings about the world, and about the topic they want to focus on in their research. It sharpens the relevance of the topic to the participant, helping participants develop it in their own personal way. This is the process of developing innovation and original research.

Learning to listen to oneself also helps students to learn to listen to others, which is crucial in becoming a successful academic researcher. Listening to other people helps to "... learn from other researchers' views and opinions ... and developing them to new realms of knowledge" (Marbach & Dekel, 2012).

For a full description of the process, see: <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/all/?id=20812>

## References

- Charmaz, Kathy. (2014) **Constructing Grounded Theory**. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: Sage.
- Dekel, Gil. (2008) **Turning On the Light Without Choosing Which Way It Will Spread**. Accessed 19 Feb 2023, from: <https://www.poeticmind.co.uk/interviews-1/turning-on-the-light-without-choosing-which-way-it-will-spread>. See paragraphs 12-24.
- Dekel, Gil. (2009) **Inspiration: a functional approach to creative practice [PhD thesis]**. Accessed 11 February 2023, from: <https://www.poeticmind.co.uk/research/phd-thesis/8-1-4-art-practice-as-a-research-method/>
- Dewey, John. (1933) **How We Think; A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process**. Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company.

- Einstein, Albert. (1931) **Einstein on Cosmic Religion and Other Opinions and Aphorisms**. Reprint. New York: Dover Publications, 2009.
- Janesick, Valerie J. (2016) **'Stretching' exercises for qualitative researchers**. 4th edition. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Marbach, Amikam., Dekel, Gil. (2012) **Listening to Yourself**. Accessed 26 January 2023, from: <https://www.poeticmind.co.uk/interviews-1/listening-to-yourself/>
- Maslow, Abraham. (1994) **Religions, Values, and Peak-Experience**. New York: Penguin.
- Massie, Miranda. (2023) 'The Jewish lawyer who left everything behind, and founded a climate Museum.' Interview with Daniel Adelson for **Ynet online**, 22 April. In Hebrew. Accessed 22 April 2023, from <https://www.ynet.co.il/environment-science/article/skricjkq3>
- Reeve, Julia., Jindal, Ruth., Bartle, Craig., and Stokes, Neil. (2021) 'Using Creative and Contemplative Pedagogy to Promote Learning Efficacy and Wellbeing within First-Year, Undergraduate Students'. **Gateway Papers**, Volume 2(1). Accessed 26 January 2023, from: <https://gp.demontfortuniversitypress.org/articles/10.3943/gp.34>
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. (1950) **The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge**. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Steiner, Rudolf. (1972) **A Modern Art of Education: Fourteen lectures given in Ilkley, Yorkshire, 5th - 17th August 1923**. London: Rudolf Steiner Press.
- T.S. Eliot. (1970) **Four Quartets**. London: Faber.

National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)  
Social Sciences  
Murray Building (Bldg 58)  
University of Southampton  
Southampton SO17 1BJ  
United Kingdom

**Web**            www.ncrm.ac.uk  
**Email**        info@ncrm.ac.uk  
**Tel**            +44 23 8059 4539  
**Twitter**      @NCRMUK