

Deep Talk

—theory and practice

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1. Theory

1.1. Roots of *Deep Talk*

The biggest impact to the development of *Deep Talk* has been the Montessori and *Godly Play* method. Additionally, *Deep Talk* has connections to VUCA-world theory (see 1.1.2), workplace mentoring methods and theories of dialogue and participation and some language learning methods.

1.1.1. Maria Montessori and foreign language learning

Italian educator Maria Montessori (1870-1952) based her theory of child-centred growing—where we respect every child's own development and individuality—in the same way we respect our own personality. The child and educator are equal. In *Deep Talk* and *Godly Play* this is the key point for dialogicity and respect for humanity. Our inner mind, language of values and ethics grows only in freedom, security and peace of our own growth.

1.1.2. VUCA-world

VUCA comes from the words Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. It was first introduced in a U.S. Military College in 1987 and has been widely used to describe our contemporary world which is changing faster than ever before. The TV, internet and social media show us clearly that we are living in a volatile and uncertain world where interpretations are complex and ambiguous.

New wisdom suggests those who will be successful in VUCA-world are those who are flexible and who have a strong inner language of values—those who learn quickly from experience and move forward with new ideas. It is necessary to have the skills for collaboration, feedback, seeking and reflecting so as to create a joint community language .

Deep Talk is a noteworthy method to develop the talents needed in our fast changing world. During the community play we are able to learn from our experiences and come up with new ideas. The community play is a dialogue process where different opinions are allowed and accepted. It provokes the development of inner language which enhances the ability for reflection and fast decision making.

1.1.3. Workplace mentoring

Ongoing changes at workplaces have created a need for workplace mentoring in which a person (or community) investigates his or her own work: its demands and procedures. Mentoring also includes self-examination and evaluation as well as developmental matters. With a mentor, a person can go through questions like roles in a workplace, how to interpret and handle different experiences and feelings, as well as how to solve problems concerning the work. In other words, in workplace mentors are improving the community language of their workplace.

The *Deep Talk* stories include many themes which can be used in a process of work mentoring. There are, for example, stories about: the values of a work community, 'Precious Stone'; things that are well, 'The Bird'; barriers or difficulties, 'The Donkey'; roles and self esteem, 'The Other-Self'. The *Deep Talk* method provides a way to handle difficult questions in situations of diverse opinions because of its 'all perspectives' nature and an intention to find a 'good enough' solution.

1.1.4. Dialogue and participation

Dialogue and participation are widely mentioned as preferred features of a well-functioning community. The simplest dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. However a real dialogue includes, for example, respect for others, being able to tell your opinions, intensive listening to others, waiting for your turn and creating a shared understanding of issues.

The root elements of a *Deep Talk* session are dialogue and participation which means that it serves as a real practicing ground for dialogue processes. *Deep Talk* also involves everyone and allows everyone to participate in the process at that level one feels good at given time. In *Deep Talk* also the silence can be used as a positive tool for dialog.

1.2. Deep Talk theory

1.2.1. The background of Deep Talk

Before *Deep Talk* was *Godly Play*. Tuula Valkonen and her colleagues learnt the *Godly Play* method and used it successfully in many day care centres in town of Salo, Finland. When the managers of day care centres were asked the reason for the success of *Godly Play*, they explained: “we all want to hear and wonder”.

This all started Tuula’s reflective process on the usefulness of *Godly Play* method with adults. Could this method be used to develop working communities and could it also benefit people with nominal Christian background?

In the quiet praying moments of the mornings Tuula’s idea of adult “Godly Play” was born. It came about easily and well structured: Tuula knew this was good and how she wanted working communities to develop. This concept didn’t even require the similar way of believing as Tuula did. Later on the new method got the name *Deep Talk*.

The first *Deep Talk* session was held, with enthusiasm, even without knowing what was going on. People just told repeatedly that they were empowered after the *Deep Talk* sessions. They described it in terms of being ‘restful’, ‘relaxed’ and ‘feeling good’. They told that it was safe and wonderful to return to a new story, and that something positive was happening in their communities.

The basis of *Deep Talk* was a trust in people and their ability to wonder openly. The dialogue learned from *Godly Play* and active, appreciative listening was transferred to be a practical tool for working communities. Only after several years of active use of *Deep Talk* are the processes behind it starting to become visible. In *Deep Talk* we learn the language of humanity together and it helps to consider the community’s wellbeing.

1.2.2. Deep Talk and Godly Play compared

Deep Talk and *Godly Play* are briefly compared in the table below. The biggest difference in method is the community play which can be found only in *Deep Talk*.

Name	<i>Godly Play</i>	<i>Deep Talk</i>
Description	A method of religious education and development of religious language	A method for community development and strengthening of inner language
Developed	Jerome Berryman, since 1960's	Tuula Valkonen (with blessing of Jerome Berryman), since 2000.
Central themes of the method		
1.	Greeting	Are you ready?
2.	Story-telling with various materials (sometimes a sand bag) and various objects	Story-telling in a sand bag with minimal objects
3.	Wondering	Wondering
4.	Free activities alone or with a partner.	Community play where everyone participates in either aloud or quietly. The play ends with words: "This is good (enough)".
5.	Celebration	Sharing and spiritual exercise
6.	Leaving	Leaving

1.2.3. Phases of a Deep Talk session

The Spanish language teacher Joseph Artigal was the first who used the term "conceptual space" in language learning. He helped Catalan street kids to learn good Catalan and Spanish by creating carefully defined conceptual spaces in the classroom. In one space kids heard a new, foreign language. In another space they learnt to produce or

speak that language. The conceptual spaces were pleasant and free of demands, which generated high motivation and remarkable results.

The use of conceptual spaces in *Godly Play* and *Deep Talk* is very similar to that used by Joseph Artigal. Both *Godly Play* and *Deep Talk* include physical spaces in which certain actions take place and the freedom and pleasantness (acceptance) are their fundamental ground-stones. Space, freedom and pleasantness are also important to the development of inner language, the language of sanctity.

Are you ready?

The first conceptual space is the hallway, the moment before the story is started. In that space we prepare ourselves to listen to the story. We try to leave all important things behind and step into the world of the story. The *Deep Talk* session starts with the words: "Are we ready to hear a story?". It is important that each person is willing to hear the story because willingness increases the motivation to step in to the process and learn the inner language.

The readiness is making the open space in yourself because the guide is not guiding the process but making the space for the process to occur. So you need to breathe deep, know yourself and the significance or holiness of the story. Treating the symbols reverence is again about creating the space, giving time and being present.

In this space the normal eye contact is used between the guide and participants.

The Story

The second conceptual space is the story. In this space you hear a story and learn something about your inner world. The story is usually hundreds or even thousands of years old. The words and props used in telling are carefully considered. The story itself is minimal and often leaves part of the story open.

The story is usually told on the sand. it's an open space we need for our language learning. In languages learning spaces open space gives language learning motivation and the best possible way. It's a hard and light paradox, light in terms of easiness of use but hard like the desert because the topics may be serious and we have the opportunity to talk of the most important things in our lives or the obstacles we want to overcome.

During the story the guide looks at the materials they show the story with, not at the listeners, which is a strong sign to those listening to open themselves to inner speech. Also by looking away from a person to the story you greet the thirdness in this sacred environment. The paradox is: thirdness had to be found person by person. To be in the

group, I had to be alone or to be with God is to be without a God. So to be together you have to be alone.

Through the story a person can sense the spirituality within the whole group. They can feel that they belong to same humanity and are significant and equally valued. The development of inner speech helps them to verbalize the environment around them and their inner world. This spirituality includes attributes that strengthen a person's ethical and moral values, it also affirms a person's ability to control over his or her own life or help to accept life as it comes. When individuals start to feel something valuable within themselves, they can transfer this to the use of entire community and co-workers.

Wondering

Wondering happens in the same conceptual space as the story-telling. After the story it is the time to wonder. This is done with carefully defined questions. Wondering changes the participant's inner pondering into words, which further strengthens the person's ability to follow his or her own inner path. The wondering also increases the importance of ethical and moral values in human life.

It is important that within the conceptual space of wondering that there are no right or wrong answers. There is only wonder at the big question of life.

Communal play

Before the third conceptual space starts, the place is changed. This changing the place derives from the method of Artigal but it is also about finding a tool and grammar for your language learning. Changing places and finding a new language at the same time allows for an imaginative leap and a language leap and a leap for a group.

In the third conceptual space participants are able to mould the reality of their community by using the tools of the story. The guide of the *Deep Talk* session leads the work gently. She or he offers some topics from the story which can be handled in communal play. It is very important, however, that the group decides or brings up the topics the play is heading to. The leader just follows.

The play is honestly being ourselves. Everything is allowed in play: we can use the props of the story to experiment, try, revise and complete the reality of our community. The guide has to take care that during the play, things are not good or bad, right or wrong. It is just important to be there and courageously let the things be passed from person to person.

In this space there is a great opportunity to develop the community. Directed and strengthened by the stories a person, group or community can gain courage to address

painful issues and process them in varied ways. An experienced guide can evaluate the process and messages of the communal play. The guide can bring up things that have been discovered by the group and help them notice their good solutions. Verbalization of inner thoughts and listening to others can increase creativity and give light to new ways.

During the community game we are looking to each other, and we see putting the language of the self and of thirdness, and we are witnessing each other trying the connections between the languages.

When we meet the thirdness there is a possibility to look on each other with loving eyes and the real greeting occurs. Always when we meet a person we are looking with our eyes to make a question “please will you love me”. This is the real moment where love is coming. We can rejoice together and cry together. This makes the meeting different from an ordinary meeting. And this is what Deep Talk is seeking for and what we want to help achieve.

You can't force thirdness in self or other but we can be sure it's there somewhere. It's there like the very first game; this happening hiding and seeking. When we are playing together you want to be found. We can not say where that thirdness is but it is there. Like treasure or tig in the game.

Giving the seeing of the thirdness is most important, it is about reverence. This is also one of the hardest works of the guide. It needs enough space, quietness and holiness and time. And still it is partly a mystery.

What can we get? When the thirdness comes, the language skills arrive in a natural way. The new language is perfectly encouraging and empowering. It starts to change the language we already have and tells our story differently because we are saying hello differently to self, others and thirdness with new language skills. At the beginning it will be trials and mistakes but if there is a positive atmosphere in a safe place everyone can let each other be what they are. Both easy and powerful then to make great things together.

The power is in the language not in the guide or in the method or the skills. If we are connected to the thirdness we accept the language of others. What the guide can have is an intrinsic knowledge that we all have thirdness and language and we accept all have this. We may not have the same amount of skills but it is not anyway about achieving an output. It's actually about how to be able to let your own eyes reach for loving eyes. So the output is living with the thirdness.

Learning the language is not an input or an output but the process itself, accepting what is happening.

Along with language learning new codes are created. The codes are not just the ones pointed out in the method, but a group can make a code about their workplace and also for themselves as a tool for interpretation and telling and understanding their lives and sharing within the thirdness that occurs in the group. So having codes within the method help people realize they can find their own code. Even the phrase “Now I wonder” , “the precious stone” or “what is our value” has a new way to put code.

Also for the guide many things are happening. They face challenges of remaining ready, open aware and showing profound respect to all objects and people. They must remain aware of many perspectives and seek to make sure their own ideas do not get put a cloud in the way that others are seeing.

Sharing

The sharing (or celebration) is the fourth conceptual space. The element of celebration is eternal. The group can choose its own way of celebration: a cup of coffee, piece of fruits or other simple food and drink. In *Deep Talk* we celebrate because we want express our appreciation that we have been able to share this deep talking moment together.

Spiritual exercises

The spiritual exercises can be given during the celebration according to the aims of the community. However everyone has to be given freedom to perform or not to perform exercises at home.

The exercises presented here are simple and are based on traditional deep meditations. The general principles of the exercises are always the same; relax, breathe deep, and be present.

The exercise can be one of the following:

1. Reinforcing positive thinking

Name three star points of your day (things you can be thankful for, things that made you happy) and repeat it daily for 21 days. This trains your brain to consider the positive sides of your life.

2. Presence exercise, time management

Breathe deeply and be present for your body and self. Go back in time 24 hours. Be thankful for the good moments and if something bad happened leave it. It is already in the past and maybe you learnt something about it.

3. Presence exercise, the path of life

Relax and breathe deeply. Think about your life. What has been good, encouraging, difficult, frightening, challenging? Where are you now? How do you feel? Is your heart saying something? How do you respond to your heart?

Think about who or what is carrying you now. Do you have a purpose for your life? Do you want to give thanks for something or pass something difficult to your Creator (or the divine or to the cosmos)?

4. Opening your mind 1, in time

Relax and breathe. Be present in this moment. Think back in time: today, youth, childhood, your parents, their parents, history and the big bang. Then think forward in time: tomorrow, next month, next year, century, millennium, eternity (or infinity). Come back to the present time. Your mind will open to relativity. Be thankful!

5. Opening your mind 2, the desert exercise

Relax and breathe. Take a small grain of sand in your palm. Think, how the grain is on your hand, which is in a room, which is in a house, which is in a block, which is in a city, which is in a country, which is on a continent, which is on the earth, which is in the solar system, which is in space, which is in infinity.

Your mind will lift outside the circle of your own thoughts and you will gain a neutral understanding of seeing things from many perspectives. Be thankful!

6. Simple program for spiritual exercises

Relax—close your eyes, breathe deeply and concentrate on your body.

a) **Listen to the wisdom of your body**

Relax and centre your thoughts on your body. Feel the energy inside you. If something makes you feel bad, concentrate your thoughts on it and tell it to go away.

b) **Live in the now**

Relax and recognize the moment. Separate mental images from the now-moment. Observe the distance and, for example, people who are speaking to you.

c) **Assume silence or meditation**

Relax and concentrate on the phrase “thank you” for 15–20 minutes. (In this instance “thank you” is an un-connected thought. The theologian Thomas Keating applied the use of the word prayer, in the manner of a mantra in meditations of Eastern religious practices.

d) **Give up the need for external acceptance and fear of criticism**

Relax and say: "I am not better or worse than anyone else. I am not above or beneath anyone." Repeat to the mirror every day, until your eyes shine: "I am good. I am free. I am brave."

e) Give up negative things / feelings / relationships

Relax and

1. Take responsibility for your feelings, especially the negative ones, and the ones which bind your energy.
2. Feel your feelings.
3. Define and name your feelings.
4. Share your feelings e.g. write them down (from your own, someone else's, and finally from an outside observer's point of view).
5. Share your feelings with a close, trusted person.
6. Ritualistically leave the feeling behind you.
7. Rejoice in your freedom!

f) Self-knowledge

Relax and ask: " Who am I? What do I want? How can I help others and the world? What are my best features, which I want to give to my relationships? What are the best features I expect from relationships? What are my mythological, historical and religious role models?"

g) Do not judge yourself or others

Relax and imagine a person who loves you in words and deeds exactly as you are. Imagine it until your eyes shine. Say: "I am with my good qualities and bad ones."

h) Detoxify your life

Relax and be aware of your body. Put, for example, your sugar cravings or smoking over your heart and tell the vice, it can go.

i) Replace fear-based thinking with love-based thinking

Relax. Imagine a stranger and say: "They have been a child like I. They have been surrounded by people who love or hate them, like I. They will age and die, like I. They are me." Empathy thinking!

j) Develop witness-like observation

Relax and observe the events of the day as if you are watching a movie. (You are conscious witness to your own life.) Don't judge or evaluate, but observe, relax and before you sleep, say: " I am witness to my dreams, I am witness to my night." One at time, observe your breathing, feelings, and thoughts, for example, for four hours. Do not judge, just witness.

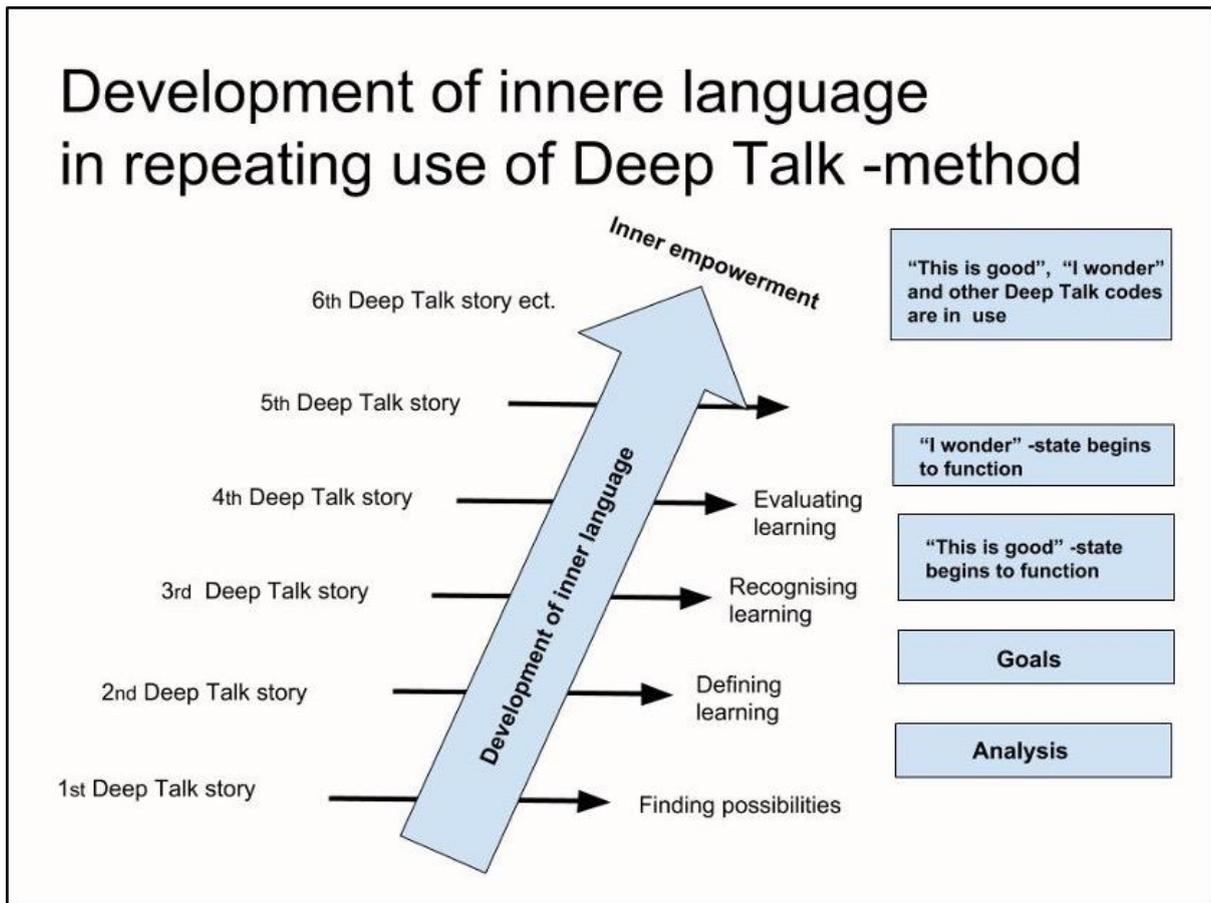
1.2.4. Benefits of narrativity

Ritva Parkkali researched the *Deep Talk* method in a group supervision of the work (Parkkali, 2016). In her work she summaries the benefits of narrativity as following:

1. Things that are in the form of a narrative are better remembered than an expository text. Stories induce imagination and offer opportunities to contemplate issues from a variety of perspectives. They also develop empathy and ethical thinking.
2. Narratives can also help to handle difficult issues. When the supervisor tells the narrative, it gives space to listen and handle issues in peace and it may encourage to bring up conversation issues that otherwise might not be spoken together.
3. The concrete materials used in *Deep Talk* are important as they bring the story closer and make it easier to follow. In community play the human figures allow the participation of each group member. The figures and other materials can also help the conversation of the community when they can give names to these symbolic objects.
4. In narrative, learning happens through wonder, involvement, perception and dialogue. This makes it possible to process one's own thoughts, reflection and perception. When the supervisor says: "Now I am thinking", she or he gives the same time and the same space to everyone's thinking.
5. The narrative gives space for vision and new ideas. This happens through stopping, seeing and accepting.
6. The motivation wakes up through the story and questions. The questions in *Deep Talk* method are held as open as possible so that a variety of answers are possible.

1.2.5. Development of inner language

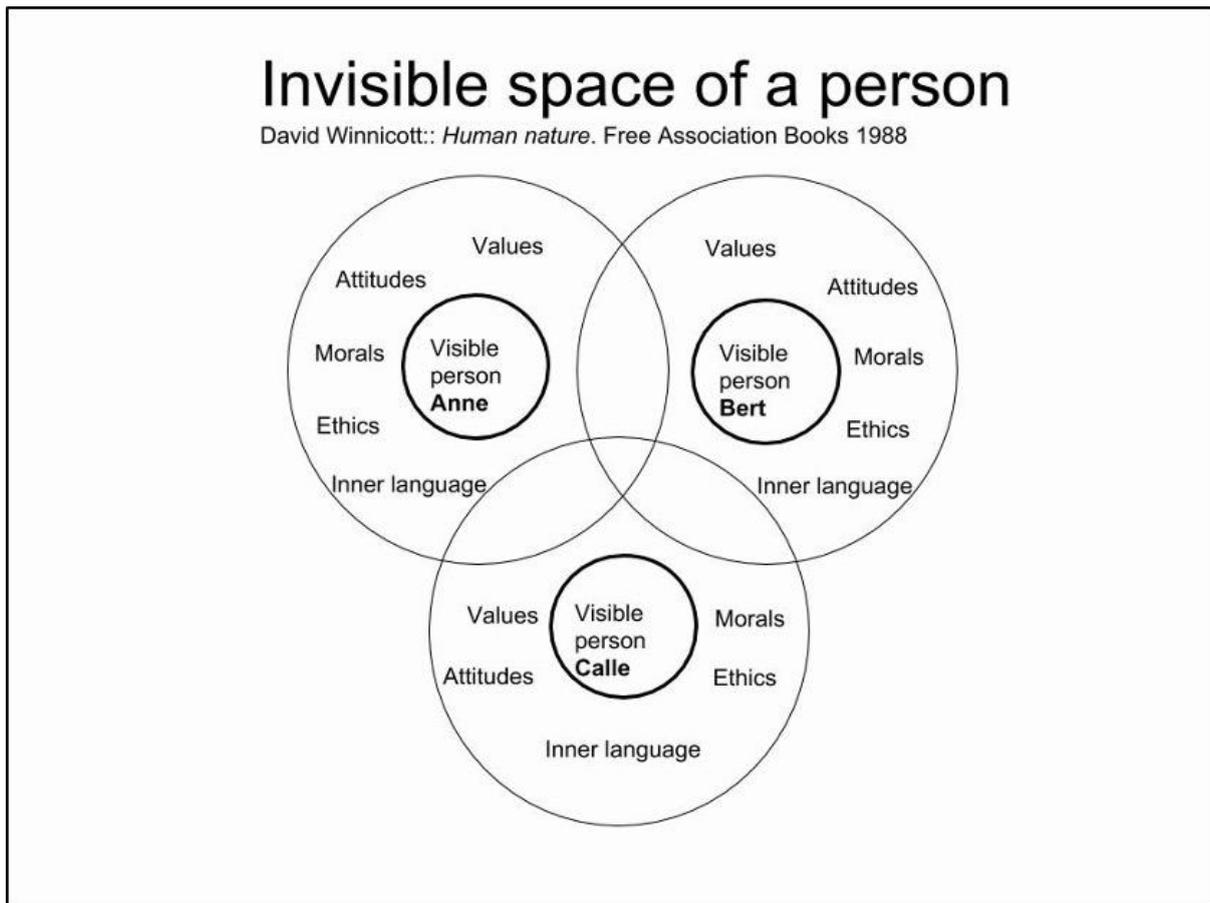
Deep Talk method develops the inner language of the participants. The process is visualized in *picture 1* below. After a first story a person starts to think about the possibilities of *Deep Talk*, becomes aware of the method. After a second *Deep Talk* story a participant starts to define his/her knowledge and reflects things. She or he may set a goal for her or his learning process through *Deep Talk*. After the third story the participant starts to recognise learning and starts to understand what the phrase "This is good" means. After the fourth *Deep Talk* story a person starts to evaluate his or her learning and "Now I wonder" state starts to function. Later on all the *Deep Talk* phrases are in use also outside the *Deep Talk* sessions, in the everyday life of a person.



Picture 1

1.2.6. Development of values

Deep Talk can help to develop the values of a person or community. *Deep Talk* strengthens each participant's inner self. This invisible space of a person has been described by David Winnicott (see the picture 2). It includes values, attitudes, morals and inner language and it is just there where a person moulds his or her personal values, attitudes, morals and inner language. *Deep Talk* method operates precisely in these areas with the intention to strengthen each participant's inner self. This is then transferred to benefit the whole group through the community game. Through repetition the group gains valuable tools to use.



Picture 2

1.2.7. The Tools of *Deep Talk*

The phrases of *Deep Talk* are important tools to strengthen the person's inner self. These tools are similar to *Godly Play*. The tools inducing strengthening are these four main phrases and the sharing (celebration).

"Are you ready"

"Are you ready" - the phrase starts the *Deep Talk* session and when it is asked the guide has the eye contact with the participants. Answering this question has a great psychological meaning because the willingness to listen to the story creates motivation to step into the process.

"Now I wonder"

"Now I wonder" - phrase shows a deep, appreciative listening, inner judgement. This phrase gives the participant the opportunity to freely take up the issue he/she finds interesting for his/her own life. With the same key, everyone can transfer the *Deep Talk*

method to his/her own life. The appreciative listening mode is powerful and safe because it gives freedom and is playful.

“Is this good enough”

"Is this good enough" - phrase occurs during community play where participants can think through, if the community play, with discussions, has reached a point of “good enough”. When an internal language of *Deep Talk* has come to an understanding of "good enough", the phrase is a very powerful key to community development.

“That’s good”

“That’s good” phrase with blessing hands finishes the community play. The leader of the session places his/her hand over the community play on the sand bag and says, "This is good (enough)." At this moment positive energy is released for everybody’s use because what was received was good enough. Blessing hands are laid over the community’s day. Tomorrow may be different, but today and here is good.

Sharing

In Sharing or in celebration you share food with others. You celebrate the moment together and that you belong to the same “clan”, to all humanity. Sharing itself also teaches us an important aspect of our life.

2. Practice

A typical *Deep Talk* session, in short, is as follows:

1. The guide forms a circle or semi-circle where everyone can see the story. The story can be told on the floor or table. Everyone is welcomed.
2. The guide makes eye-contact with the participants and begin with the question: “Are you ready to hear a story?”.
3. The guide tells the story with materials and have no eye contact with participants, keeping their gaze in the sand bag and with the figures.
4. The guide now asks the wondering questions, maintaining normal eye contact from now on.
5. The guide collects the figures from the sand. The guide handles the figures with respect and preferably re-tells to everyone what the figures represented. Then the guide closes the sand bag.

6. The guide asks the participants to change the places. The leader also changes his/her place.
7. The sand bag is opened again. The guide can remind: "*There is no right and wrong but all answers are equally correct.*" The guide shows playfulness in their manner as they look around and start working and playing with the community's reality.
8. The guide starts to form a current circumstances that drives from and the story just heard. The sand is formed according to the responses of the participants. The guide may ask: "How is your day? Are there any mountains, valleys, rivers? What do we put on the sand to represent your day?"
9. Time for community questions and the play. Here the role of the guide is to follow in which direction the answers of the community lead the play.
10. The guide asks the participants to take a figure from a basket (which contains figures with different shapes/emotions) and place it on the landscape of the sand bag.
11. The discussion of the figure locations takes place—'what do you want to tell about yourself?'
12. The guide closes up the session by asking: "Is this good enough?" and putting the hands over the landscape as a mark of closing: "This is good".