

Teach for Joy

Toss Out the Tabla Raza Now!

by Edna Harr

By the way of introduction, I will tell you that I have literally taught all my life and that includes teaching for five years in Jefferson County Public Schools as a lay teacher for the alternative school and as an English tutor for non-English speaking children in another half dozen traditional schools. I have really learned how to teach through my team teaching experience at the alternative school. I am always looking for ways to improve my teaching and have continued to collect ideas. Here I will present the ones that I use a lot for your consideration, because they work for me.

At some point, I realized that you cannot really "teach" anyone anything. That "teach" is a transitive verb in our language (and the other three that I am familiar with) is ridiculous and shows to what degree our civilization has become so arrogantly left-brained. This idea feeds into the bizarre notion that people of any age come to us, the Great Ones, with empty minds (the tabla raza concept), and we write upon them. Now I ask you in all seriousness, have you ever met anyone with an empty mind? Even when you look into the eyes of a healthy newborn, there is Somebody looking back at you and not an empty mind.

What we can do, however, is provide the environment, the materials, the ideas and the model so that people may learn. We can even entice them into learning, but we cannot stuff it down their throats.

So I have wandered from camp to camp, collecting ideas that worked for me from NLP, Superlearning, Edu-K, great teachers in the field, brain research, meditation, and more. Briefly, I have come up with ways to provide people with an experience involving all of the body-mind-spirit that is hard to resist because it is joyous and allows the whole system to function as it was meant to. By the way, if you aren't having great fun teaching, forget it until you figure out how to EN-JOY yourself.

Basically there are three essential pieces to teaching: the teacher, the environment, and the student. If any of these parts are missing or dysfunctional, learning does not occur, and infinite variations of these parts exist.

As teachers . . .

we have the greatest control over this piece, or do we? If we use our skills as balancers to clear our subconscious minds of our own garbage, yes, we can. How do we recognize an ideal teacher, and how can we integrate that mode into our existing system? The Superlearning people have delineated an ideal teacher in terms of what actually works to get information across. One of the factors that they find very important is that the teacher be an authority. Of course this means a grasp of your subject, but in our field we are a bit luckier in that really what we have to know is how to use and explain to others how to use *The TFH Book*. I often look things up in the book while teaching, even if I already know them, because it is less intimidating to students than showing off my great memory, assuming in any case that I indeed have one... Getting them to be familiar and **comfortable** with using the book is a great service to them, simply because it means that out there in the field, confronted at some time with an unhappy muscle, a pain, whatever, they might actually think of using the book rather than thinking to themselves how they wished they had paid more attention in TFH class, but can't quite remember the spot, wouldn't want to rub the **wrong** spot, well never mind, an opportunity for all of us is lost.

Another aspect of the idea of teacher as authority is to dress a tad better than the students. As those of you who know me well know, I am not the clothes horse of the family. I'd be happy in sweats and tennies, caftan and barefoot, hair down, whatever. I'm kinesthetic, and how it feels on me matters more than how it looks. Nonetheless, I own a few Big City Woman disguises, which I always use when teaching, hair up,

respectable shoes and all. Like it or not (the truth is, it's a societal quirk with no Real Meaning). In this time and place, people cannot hear you if you shock their sensibilities; so I put on my disguise and go teaching.

Perhaps the most important aspect to an inspired teacher is the gentle correction, with the emphasis on gentle. It's tempting for us all to show what we know, and this is appropriate at times or your students won't be back. But at the same time a balance must be struck between the urge to give information and the essential quality of maintaining the student in a safe environment that does not stress his ego, but rather supports his natural ability to play and hear easily. I'm sure you each remember a time when you gave (God forbid) a wrong answer and the teacher's response was to correct you in some less than gentle way. Often I would then retreat into my internal conversation ("How could you be so dumb?") and actually miss the right answer when it was given. Moreover, I might stay there at some level for the rest of the class, unable to fully participate and learn optimally from then on. A famous educator said "Children (people) don't give wrong answers, we ask the wrong questions." This is a good idea; think about it. I actually practice saying things I've thought up or collected from others until they are second nature. Phillip Crockford says "That's one way to look at it." (And if it's appropriate with a student you know is generally confident, and you explore that thought, the supposedly wrong answer, you may find it is correct and a view point that you missed!) Another one is, "That's true, and I'm actually looking for something else." Or, "I guess I asked the wrong question, although I like (love!) your answer." Or perhaps, "How did you know that! It's actually the answer to the next question I was thinking of asking." Or simply, "Yes! and...?" to elicit more information from the person speaking or even someone else. If all else fails, "Great! you were listening when I talked about ..whatever.. and right now I was thinking more about ...x..." Here's the point: you simply never negate a student, which means you never say, "No." What! Not even if they're WRONG??? No, especially

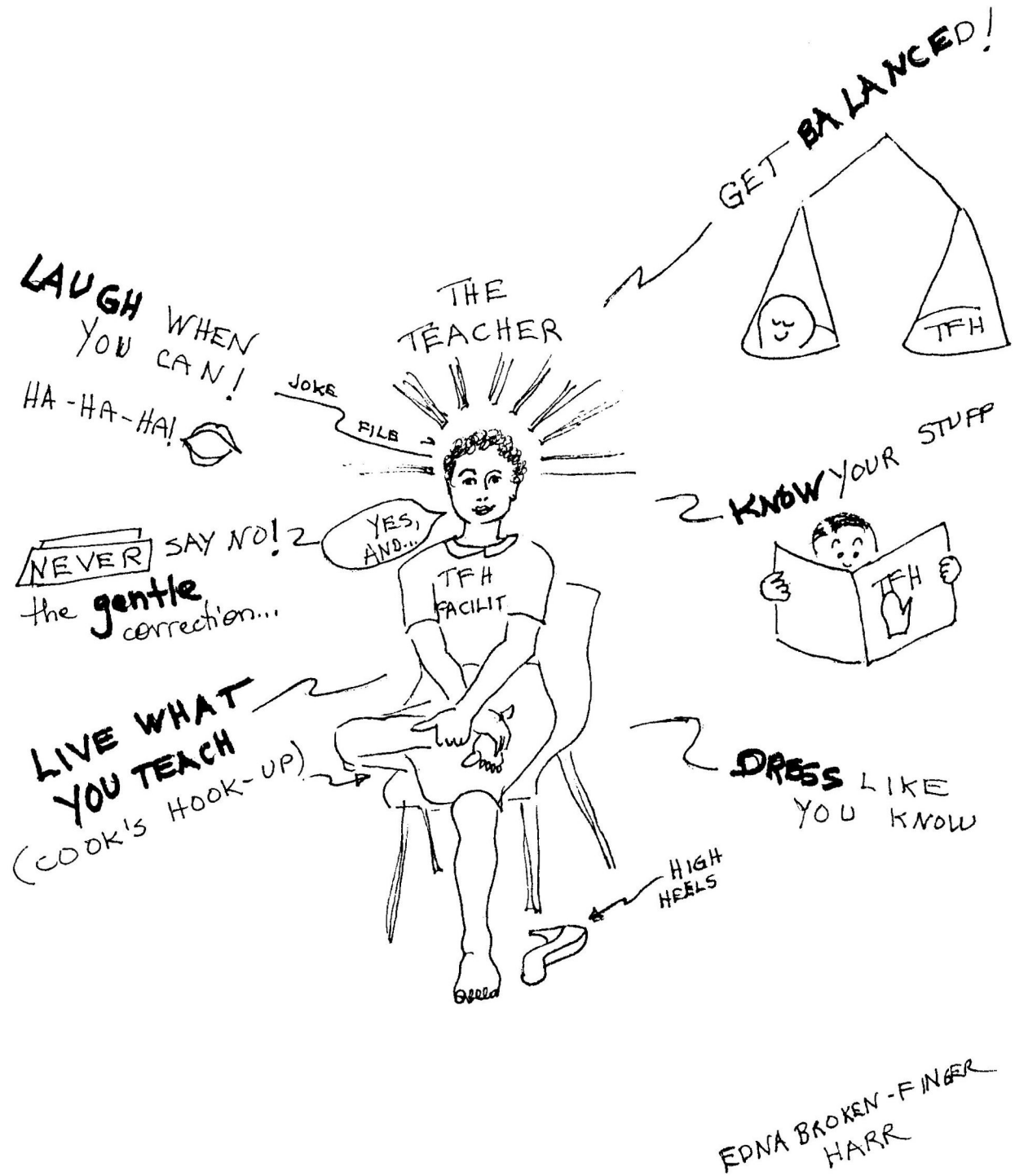
not then. Many opportunities will arise in class to **clarify** information.

Know that whenever there is a choice between giving information and honoring your student, honor your student; the information can wait. The probabilities are that a need to give out the information is your own ego needing to be wise. Just give it a hug and send it to the library. This is one of the qualities that is the mark of the compassionate teacher.

So, what to do? First go get a balance for things like "I release the need to be right." "I release the need to make others wrong." "I honor my student more than my information." "I am a sensitive and compassionate teacher." "I easily think of what to say instead of 'no'." Etc.

Incidentally, giving up our culture's propensity toward saying "no" to people over whom we have authority will feel amazingly good, once you get the hang of it. I can actually feel peoples' energy field contract when I do say no to them as an authority, and then mine contracts back! Ouch. And, whoops, there goes the flow... Parents can get really good at this starting when babies begin grabbing everything. Better than saying no is to have an ample supply of brightly colored intriguing things at hand and entice the child to swap. You do the same thing with older people, who are as vulnerable as children when learning... , but at a more sophisticated level.

A third aspect of a teacher is modeling (living) the behavior you wish to transmit to the student. In TFH this is the best part. This means we get to get ourselves balanced, touched, rubbed, held, pain and fears released, beliefs changed, whatever! It's usually pretty easy for me to find a little pain or an unhappy muscle, but if not there's always the fourteen to check and there's nearly always one of them sleeping on the job... This also means letting the students see you as vulnerable and human. Won't this destroy the authority figure? No. In fact it adds to the total picture the students have of you as once having been where they are and having moved to a working knowledge of your topic.



Last but not least is to have a gentle but active sense of humor. I collect stories, teaching stories on myself and others, and toss them in whenever it feels right. I have a joke file and bring a folder of cartoons from the newspapers labeled "endorphin releasers: please help yourself."

SO...
BALANCE
KNOW YOUR STUFF
DRESS LIKE YOU KNOW
NEVER SAY NO
LIVE WHAT YOU TEACH
LAUGH WHEN YOU CAN

The environment

is the next place to consider. Create a beautiful, relaxing environment that appeals to all of the senses. This is important because it is part of increasing the associations and connections that serve as anchor points for the new information and allow the students to integrate it easily and gently into their systems. It also helps the body-mind computer "get it".

I usually carry an incandescent lamp and use a paper ring with liquid incense which I put on a good half hour before anyone gets there. That way, it is usually well dispersed before anyone with allergies can contact it, but leaves enough of a scent in the air for the brain to react to the smell subconsciously. The lamp carries a reminder of a home environment with it. Whenever possible, I avoid florescent lighting because it irritates me. I prefer natural lighting.

I play alpha tapes in the background to induce an alpha brain wave in the students. I consider this aspect so critical that I actually hand-carried two mini-speakers and a Walkman to Chile when Ilsa and I taught down there. This alpha brain wave, slower and calmer than beta, is optimum for learning and for teaching. One can be enthusiastic and lively without being hyper. Beta is known to be a brainwave that encourages split brain function, whereas alpha allows whole brain processing, as well as access to the subconscious mind where ninety percent of learning takes place anyway. Of course people stay conscious at this level, and it is

not like deep hypnosis where you might be able to reprogram people to be chickens. I often muscle test the group to determine what time increment to stay in alpha, running from one hour to an hour and ten minutes. This is the amount of time the adult Western brain comfortably focuses or concentrates. I actually use a timer, and when the time is up, I require two minutes of dance. This is not a break for eating, drinking or bathroom, which I expect my students to take care of as needed. I put on many different kinds of dance tapes and lead cross crawls, K-27's, lazy eights for ears, eyes and so on. This timing and leading the brain waves seems to be a critical piece for people, and I get many comments from people who say that they leave class feeling more refreshed than when they came in and that things "just seemed to flow into (their) head."

In Denver, I bring fresh flowers to the classroom. When I travel I bring a brass vase and a cardboard tube of silk flowers in case it is too difficult to get fresh ones. This says to my students that I honor them. In the actual teaching process, I use a wonderful device known as "mind maps." I have included some (primitive, I broke my drawing finger after Christmas) examples of mind maps for you in this paper. Very briefly, the topic is in the center, surrounded by key words that explain it as well as simple illustrations which you may color to easily remember the gist of this paper. (No stick figures, please; these turn off the right brain!)

I also bring things to eat, popcorn, deli breads, crackers, vegetable spreads. I avoid fruits and cheeses because they make some people sleepy in the afternoon. Of course I see that there is good drinking water available.

The charts available from the TFH Foundation hung around the classroom serve as great subliminals, and, as I teach, I use large mind maps, which I hang around the classroom. Often I plan my graphics ahead and pencil them in lightly. Forget the myth that you must be a Leonardo Da Vinci to do this. It's OK to start with stick figures (like a skeleton) .. Just remember to round them out before you trace them in class. Again, practice and be playful.



The material itself insures an adequate amount of touch and physical movement beyond the required dance. The dance is required nonetheless because I clearly see that movement enhances learning. I have this theory that our brains are actually located in the gluteus maximus. If your students sit too long, constricting their brains, their ability to learn drops off significantly.

SO...

HELP MAKE CONNECTIONS

VISUAL

AUDITORY

GUSTATORY

OLFACTORY

KINESTHETIC

The students themselves . . .

are the variable that seems most beyond our control, and in a sense it is. However, if you keep in mind that the students are not unlike us and need more support, an appropriate environment, a gentle authority, and a good model, you can provide those aspects of learning that encourage the students to operate at their best.

The first thing I do before class is meditate or pray to get myself into a quiet, open, clear space. I deliberately put aside my own problems and bring myself fully into the present moment. Sometimes, this seems impossible. In that case I include a statement about my current state ("I'm feeling ... for example, scattered, ... today"), and I ask for their help ("and I'd like ... for example, for you to gently point out to me if I get off track"). This works better for me than trying to pretend that I'm not feeling what I'm really feeling. If I pretend, it usually comes out in some less desirable way, and the students will often blame themselves. This arouses their egos, which will react with either hostility or depression, depending on their patterns. Telling the truth sometimes requires a balance, since it is probably the most courageous thing you can do with your life.

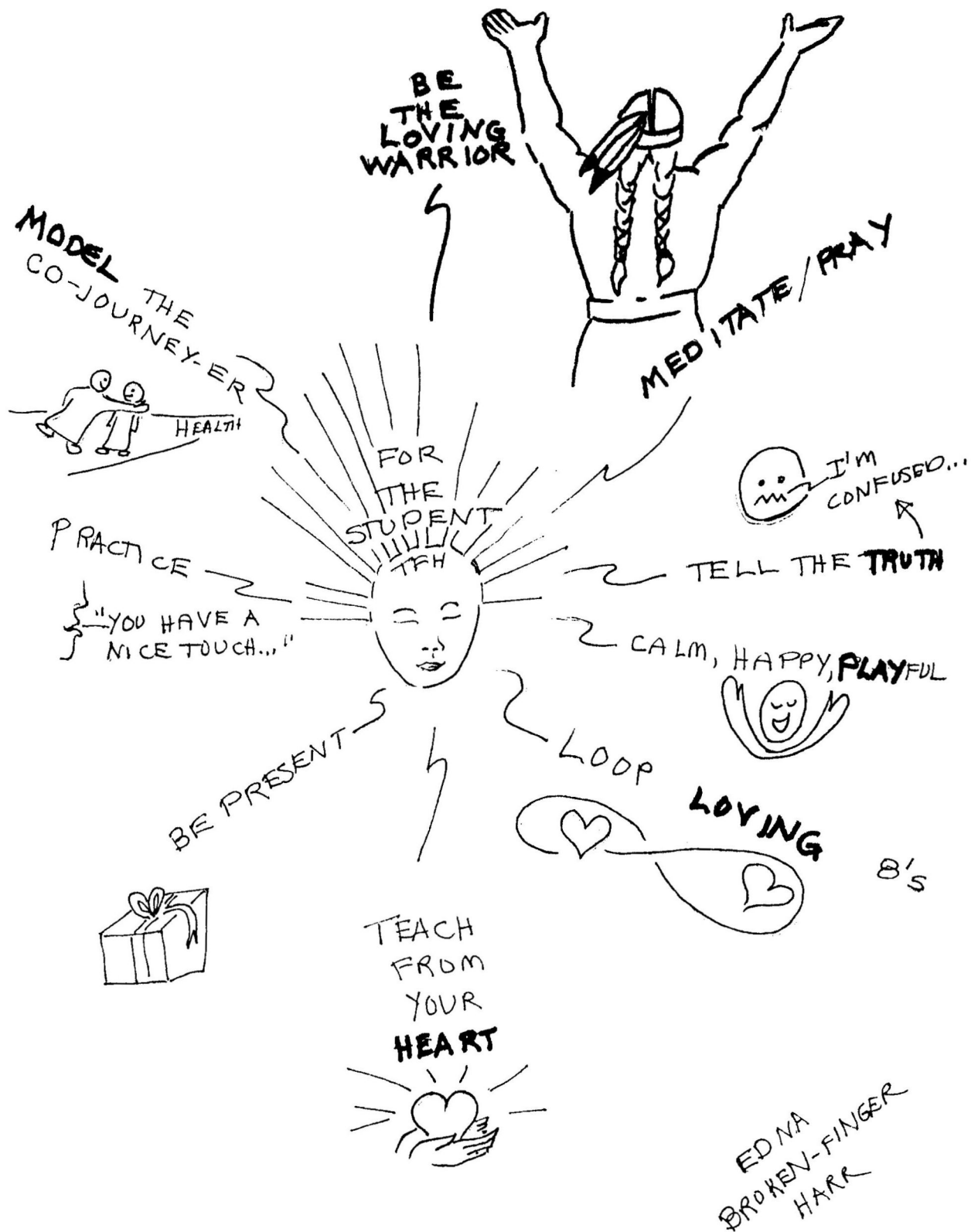
I found a wonderful use for figure eights, which I use just after I meditate as people are coming in. In my mind, I loop figure eights of light between my heart chakra, my soul, and God, and then between my heart chakra

and each person's heart chakra, their souls, and God, asking God to be in charge of this process so that it is done in whatever way is appropriate for each individual. In this way I am able to teach from the heart center on a consistent basis.

Depending on the group I have, I will ask the students to take a few moments of silence, to bring themselves to be fully present. I often help them out by asking them to park outside whatever might bring them tension, just for the duration of the class. In this way they give up nothing. If after class, they find they still need whatever that is, they can pick it up again before they go home. And who knows, they might find out they really don't need it after all. To offer more help with being fully present, I do an opening circle ("I'm Edna, and I'm here because I love to teach, ... " for example). It is also very effective to invite the students to remember a time when they learned easily and to muscle test that frame of mind into the present.

All of these techniques are for bringing yourself and your students to be fully present. I cannot overemphasize the importance of doing this, one way or another. It is critical to recognize that in this age of information there is so much competition for our attention that it is very difficult for most of us to concentrate fully on the moment, to say nothing of the interference caused by personal crisis. If the person has had a run in with their boss, or even something minor like having someone cut them for in traffic before class, it usually takes them twenty minutes at a minimum to stop running that scene in their heads and actually be in class. Twenty minutes! That means that even if they look like they are with you, they are wandering out the window at every opportunity and not concentrating on the material you present.

On the care and feeding of the student's ego-personality, it is easiest simply to avoid arousing the student's defenses. One does that by providing a safe environment and using the gentle correction. A safe environment includes permission (and of course modeling) to relax, to have fun with each other and the material, and to be playful (some may need to know that this activates



Touch For Health International Journal, 1990

whole brain learning) with a guarantee that this does not include making fun of other people or using sarcasm (this means you occasionally have to be able to speak privately to someone who hasn't out grown that) and a fairly relaxed type of confidentiality so that nothing embarrassing goes out of class.

As a rule, you can't do or say too much to maintain your student's self images, and what ever you do or say must be sincere. They sense a white lie in a nanosecond, and this casts doubt on everything else you do. Recapturing their trust after that is very difficult. So if you sense any discrepancy in yourself when you think about saying something supportive to another, great!, another opportunity to balance has just come your way. I practice saying supportive things to people in front of a mirror or with a friend. Make up a list of believable things you would like to hear about yourself, and go from there.

We all have ego barriers, and in as much as they allow us to develop as individuals, they are appropriate. However, they also function (as Dr. Dewe says) to protect the you that they know and that does not include a you that is comfortable and fluid with new materials and ways of being. Think about what we ask of people as we teach Touch for Health as a new way of being: the health practitioner, the teacher, the facilitator, a co-journey-er in the process of healing. How to move around these new roles? The ability to guide people through a light meditation using the alpha music while describing the benefits of these changes and how they look-feel that is different, loving, and powerful is very helpful. Modeling this behavior is essential, and we all all slide into old behaviors. If you can use that moment, draw attention to it, smile at yourself, and gently correct yourself out loud to the students ("Did you just see me fix that person??? Maybe I'd better hop off my medical model here and get myself balanced!"). This can be an incredibly powerful lesson for all. It requires warrior courage, but is worth throwing yourself out there, believe me. So where to find warrior

courage these days? Really this means loving yourself enough to know you can do this and thrive AND enough to know you can afford to be generous with your love for others. Putting your mutual learning experience before your pride is a very loving gesture. It is that loving gesture that is the matrix of the warrior courage.

SO ...

MEDITATE/PRAY

TELL THE TRUTH

LOOP LOVING EIGHTS

TEACH FROM YOUR HEART

BE PRESENT

PLAY

PRACTICE REAL COMPLIMENTS

MODEL THE CO-JOURNEY-ER

BE THE LOVING WARRIOR

These are the most useful pieces I have gathered in my wanderings. I don't use all of them all the time, and sometimes I use something different a time or two. I am willing to try on any harmless behavior at least once. I have to say that sometimes I've had my doubts at first about even what were to later become my favorite pieces. But I'm an abyss leaper by nature. (The try-anything-harmless-once type.) I realize that not everyone is, and they still may be great teachers. I invite you to explore these ideas by calling me or by practicing with your trusted friend or by abyss leaping.

TEACH FOR JOY!

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