

**EBTA's Inaugural Summer Camp  
Jakob-Ramsjo Island, Helsinki, Finland**

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**July 2016**

**Senior SF Practitioners Facilitating:**

- *Peter Sundman (Finland)*
- *Dr. Ursula Buehlmann (Switzerland)*
- *John Wheeler (United Kingdom)*
- *Ferdinand Wolf (Austria)*

**SF Practitioners Attending:**

- *Mikhail Ponomarev (Russia)*
- *Victor Bogomolov (Russia)*
- *Matthias Schwab (Germany)*
- *Arseniy Pavlovsky (Latvia)*
- *Naomi Whitehead (United Kingdom)*
- *Dimitry Stebakoff (Russia)*

*EBTA's inaugural Summer Camp - By Naomi Whitehead (30th August 2016)*

EBTA's inaugural Summer Camp, hosted by Peter Sundman in the sublime and beautiful Summer House, where, alongside John Wheeler, Ursula Buehlmann and Ferdinand Wolf, participants were immersed into a gentle, significant and positive solution focused collaboration. In recounting my time there, I seek to reflect some of our myriad experiences whilst being congruent with the fact that it is only my eyes that I can be truly accountable for.

The Summer Camp began as I stepped off the Helsinki bus to be met by two warm and friendly open faces, Peter and Ferdinand. I sensed the week ahead was going to be a mixture of blissful, calm and challenging experiences, this was quickly confirmed. Peter and Ferdinand took me to Inkoo's very organised Finnish supermarket. I was struck by how comfortable it felt to be meandering about with two people I had never met, exploring new types of strawberries and getting food organised for the working holiday awaiting us. The genial welcome took a new twist of mischief when Peter offered me one his favourite mint liquorice sweets and unashamedly claimed he assessed integrity on the basis of reactions to these.

We then boarded the speedboat to cross the water from Inkoo to the serene Jakob-Ramsjo Island where in Peter's Summer House, our solution focused exchanges and exploration would commence. Almost immediately we were seated and respectfully asked about what we might like to do and discuss over the forthcoming days. We were introduced to the intricacies of the Island's rhythms and requirements for effective inhabitation. Various next steps were clarified and suddenly I had agreed to smoke my first ever fish! Caught so competently by Arseniy who, on that day had, I think, surpassed even his own expectations in extracting these creatures from the surrounding sea. True as ever to the SF approach we were all caught by an element of surprise, a key element of course of effective SF conversations which usually leads to unexpected and profound positive change. I'm not sure we could say this for our first ever fish smoking experience! But, what could be said is that Peter complimented our efforts with patience, and Ursula proved the unwavering companion whose focus lead to our preferred future.

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The days then unfolded to provide a rich and stimulating learning experience where everyone's unique approach and strengths were quietly celebrated. Debates ensued about whether SF affects neuroplasticity or absolutely does not and cannot, due to the philosophy that SF change can be felt and experienced anywhere in the body, mind or experience. Consideration was given to whether there can really be a representative theory of change and if so what elements should it contain. On another day, on the beach we congregated into a circle and discussed how our respective countries had grown and developed the approach and which actions appeared to make most impact. Suggestions were made about ways to take this further and there was a deep recognition of everyone's immovable commitment to expand SF more widely. Examples discussed included online conferences in Russia, translations of SF material into Latvian, invitations by John in the earlier days to Insoo and Steve to visit the UK and attendance at EBTA by Matthias connecting to his introduction of SF into work with offenders in Germany.

One insightful and excellent conversation was had about the importance of staying with a clients' metaphor, however unusual. John raised Cade's example of when a client had talked about decorating in detail and Cade recognised this as a metaphor for sexual challenges and therefore activity the client was referring to. By skilfully enquiring about the detail of decorating and when decorating went well the client slowly and surely constructed his own solutions about his sexual challenges. Dimitry discussed the importance of recognising what is a priority to someone, no matter how different or alien this may be to one's own frame of reference, his example about his clients' views on spirituality. Insoo's work was raised where someone had said to her "I think I've been cursed by the gods" and she replied "how will you know when you are no longer cursed?". Ursula then brought in another story of a young person who said they wanted to sell their family, she asked back "Ok, so if you would sell your family, what would you say to make a sale on the market?" how clever to shape a question that forced the young person to think of their family's assets while staying totally on the surface of their specific words and meanings.

Ferdinand raised the tree of life and how he used this in an SF way to find out from people 'what about now, where are you now' and discussed the power and impact of remaining client centred, interactional, competency based and future oriented. He talked us through SF genomes and Victor described a case where the client had moved significantly into becoming 'unstuck' after a period of being very 'stuck' and what he felt the client had done to achieve this. Victor also raised for our exploration, if and when it is ever ok to acknowledge a shared struggle that we too may have experienced, in order to normalise the clients' experience and/or provide added insight. In addition he raised how helpful it can be to share with the client if you feel you have the focus or question wrong. This curious enquiry and 'not knowing' position, as we all know, are such essential parts of the SF dance. The act of which truly reflects the client as expert and the practitioner as simply the mechanism through which we afford a deepening sense of self-efficacy and expertise.

Another key luxury of the camp was the opportunity for those of us newer to the SF world to continue the spirit of SF as characterised by Insoo and Steve and all those that have followed since. Peter shared how much he deeply missed them, revealing through his body language and words the depth of this sentiment and the professional companionship, intellectual exchange and warmth they had provided. This set the backdrop for Ferdinand's recollections. Ferdinand explained with a wry wit that that he would translate for Steve at conferences in Vienna and how painstaking and fascinating this task always was. Not only due to the complex and academically demanding role of converting psychological ideas across two languages but also how he was required to somehow find a comfortable position in Steve's atmosphere. The atmosphere of silence and waiting. Apparently Steve would enter the room, where all these desperate to learn and paying delegates would be waiting and he would just sit there and wait saying nothing. Some people would leave in frustration and confusion and then finally someone would ask a question. If Steve did not like the question he would reply 'I don't know what you mean' and imply it was the wrong question, until another delegate was brave enough to make a different attempt. Eventually the conference and the discussions would begin but how curious for those of us not there to hear of this unusual style and consider what we may take from it.

Ferdinand added perspective to these stories with details of his trip to their home where Steve would display a welcoming and informal approach, inviting a beer first thing in the morning while in contrast Insoo would studiously be absorbed in her computer working diligently and consistently from 5am in the morning. Notwithstanding this was always balanced with her truly affirming and uniquely interested ability to develop SF ideas, reflected in John's account of satisfying and lengthy conversations running late into the evenings in her visits to Tyneside. A beautiful conclusion to this dialogue was in Ferdinand's description of holding Steve's hand as he was dying, as he sensitively outlined the exchange they had shared about continuing his legacy.

Other delights included Ursula's direct, kinaesthetic and creative approach to developing SF visions, which seemed to provide a distinguished clarity. For example, her eye contact exercise which asked us to wander near rocks by the sea and make unblinking two minutes eye contact, during which we were requested to bring to mind each person's qualities and resources. Somehow for me this fitted with Matthias' artistic activity, which was about each of us expressing ourselves exactly as we wished on paper while considering SF and art simultaneously. Then he asked us to pass this on. Then he asked the person that received the art in front of them to destroy it in some way. We continued to alter and amend until Matthias stated we display what was in front of us in some creative way. Each was suspended with cotton, stuck against windows, positioned between flowers. All unexpected and surprising and provoking a consideration of what is real.

Alongside the discourse there was of course lots of fun and laughter, like when we threw our hands in the air for Mikhail's hilarious Samurai energiser or over dinner as we ate together and sampled one another's specialities. These dinners often lasted for some time and were contented, sometimes quiet, sometimes noisy, and during which we were all frequently distracted by the exceptional vivid pink and orange sunsets, drawn out over many hours as the reality of our far north location revealed itself. On two evenings there was music and singing with John's mandolin banjo, Dimitry's guitar, both of their lovely voices, improvisation, traditional Russian song and John's solution focused musical rhyme! Each day, these evenings were followed by my breakfast ringing of the bell and Peter's graceful consultation regarding what the emergent agenda might be.

The passion of all was striking during our camp. Arseniy impressed us with how he was bringing SF into Latvia in spite of the geographical challenges felt by him and his Russian colleagues, Victor, Dimitry and Mikhail. It felt important and reminded me how determined and continued tenacity can be transformative when used in the face of obstacles - social, political, personal or professional. We played KUBB, an unfamiliar and strange wood game to me which installed a small amount of competitive energy briefly, needed against the backdrop of such polite consideration, although even in this the rules gradually seemed to float away - militancy and winning not appearing to fit with our organic and natural environment!

People committed to a presence and mindfulness during this Inaugural Summer Camp, which was tangibly demonstrated by acts such as Victor's social media technology detox. Unanticipated pearls of wisdom were shared, for example Peter on parenting: "let the child teach you and show you what to do". We were also privileged to experience our SF in action such as seeing how tiny acts of innovation can quickly allow us to reach our desired destination. The illustration of this to me being 'SF cooking' with John when as I faced an unexpected issue, he demonstrated such a simple example of seeing the possibilities not the limitations I was able to overturn the challenge and produce an almost perfect meal of my very own melanzane special.

So to summarise there was a purity of atmosphere. I have recently come across and even been temporarily seduced by a dogma about how SF should be. In that, there is a judgement. I wish for less judgement either of others or myself, for there lies an idea of perfection, superiority, academic status and authority. These values for me have a discordance with an approach that celebrates individual strengths and resources, occurring differently in every person they inhabit. You never know what will happen or what will work so the magic is in experimenting and fine tuning your intuition to decide. The gentle ways we helped each other that week is what is important. As was the curiosity we had for one another's professions, lives and learning. Finally what I observed was

that even for a fast paced person like me, the lack of rushing coupled with the abundance of noticing never equalled boredom, instead it was an illustration of how excellent it is to sit comfortably together, with difference.