

How We Can Be Together From Before the Beginning: Womb Surround Birth Process



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Group experiences are a powerful way to repattern early trauma when they are positive, connected, resourced and grounded. Eventually, experiences of early trauma from our family of origin or from overwhelming groups in general will arise when you engage in therapy with others.

What exactly happens in these gatherings?

How is it that an early overwhelming memory like birth can be brought to the surface and changed to something new?

A small group of 5-7 people can explore prenatal and birth experience in The Womb Surround Birth Process Group, a form developed by Ray Castellino DC (retired), RPP, RCST®. Trained facilitators evoke positive affect, promote a specific set a principles, and encourage contingent communication between group members. When implicit memories are brought into consciousness, facilitators can slow the pace, resource the person having the experience, and create a felt sense of safety so that early, bodily-felt memories can be released. New neural pathways connected to our blueprint for life can be created, restored or repaired.

Ray Castellino is credited with bringing the notion of slow, universal, biological rhythms and energetic attention as governing principles for health to the pre and perinatal world. The practical application of “attending to” as a modality changes the focus from the traumatic history to the present, life-giving energy and flow found in the body or somatically-oriented world.

Today, Castellino is a vivacious man in his early 70's with over 40 years' experience in the somatic healing arts. He has made a significant contribution to the therapeutic world through the development of the Womb Surround method and his related professional training so that practitioners can learn his specific format to explore early trauma. Patterns that arise from early prenatal and perinatal trauma include: transgenerational trauma; conception; a variety of prenatal experiences that range from abortion ideation to prenatal bonding and baby consciousness; birth interventions of all kinds; family dynamics; and a special kind of prenatal and perinatal experience that fits a category called 'Double Binds'. Castellino offers two out of eight training modules just on these experiences, which can include ancestral patterns, twin loss and twin dynamics, near death experiences, breech deliveries, adoption, neonatal intensive care experiences, and more. Positive early imprints include feeling welcomed, wanted, loved, safe, protected, attuned to, seen, and heard. Each person carries his/her own unique signature of experiences.

A Historical Overview

Prenatal and perinatal early trauma resolution therapies have evolved along an experiential continuum. Early pioneers in birth trauma healing were psychoanalysts, starting with Otto Rank, a disciple of Freud. As therapies grew, body psychotherapy emerged as a discipline through the works of Wilhelm Reich. However, there remained a vein of psychoanalysts who explored early prenatal and perinatal imprints including,

RD Laing, Donald Winnicott, Nandor Fodor, and Graham Farrant. Significant contributions were made to the field of early memories in the body from Frank Lake, Stan Grof, Arthur Janov, and William Emerson. A curious enthusiast of prenatal and perinatal therapies may remember Priming, Rebirthing, Holotropic Breathwork and more from the last century.

Castellino's approach is uniquely different from the original Pre and Perinatalists. He developed his theories and practices from a blend of energy therapy, bodywork and trauma resolution, including Randolph Stone (founder of Polarity Therapy), elder osteopaths including William Garner Sutherland, and Chiropractor/Osteopath, Major Bertrand Russel DeJarnette. He is credited with bringing the notion of slow, universal, biological rhythms and energetic attention as governing principles for health to the pre and perinatal world. The practical application of “attending to” as a modality changes the focus from the traumatic history to the present, life-giving energy and flow found in the body or somatically-oriented world. Influences from William Emerson (pioneer in prenatal and perinatal psychology), Franklyn Sills (Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy Pioneer) and Peter Levine (founder of Somatic Experiencing®) have profound influences on his work. Castellino is an avid collaborator. His work is cross pollinated with Mary Jackson (home birth midwife), Tara Blasco (co-director of the non-profit family research clinic that Castellino found with Wendy Anne McCarty) and Anna Chitty (a noted Craniosacral and Polarity Therapy Teacher).

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His work is also highly informed by his training as a musician and music teacher. He is a master of sensing into the patterns that can arise from difficulties from the prenatal and perinatal period. His observations, somatic skills, and passion for healing early overwhelming events in the nervous system of the families he was seeing came about after he started doing healing work with babies. Seeing how families' experiences affected the baby, he began to work with small groups to create a therapy that would help the whole family. This small group workshop is the product of the training and the form he developed. It is ideal for creating a safe container and experiential dips into a person's early history, and it is somatic therapy at its core.

overwhelming event or events in our history but no longer serve in the present; in fact, they can get in the way of our growth or even the resolution of the original trauma. Examples of early overwhelming patterns include feeling wrong because our birth pattern was different than the norm, that we don't belong because of something that happened in utero, or that relationships are just too hard. People seeking these group experiences grasp that something implicit is at play and talk therapy isn't enough to heal it. We often see health conditions in adults linked with early overwhelming imprints such as complex syndromes, chronic pain, depression, hyper vigilance, sleep disorders, eating disorders, and more.

The Womb Surround functions to provide reparative experiences that we needed then to develop more fully and



Early Imprints and Sequencing

We develop in a sequence: conception, implantation, embryo, fetus, baby. Our cells unfold in a sequence, too. We form our bodies in relationship with our mother, our first environment, and then our family. Participants in the Womb Surround Process create specific intentions based on patterns that continue, in many ways, to confine and function as constrictions detrimental in their lives. These patterns are adaptive to the

completely so participants are able to change how they feel about themselves and be free to be the people they want to be today.

Facilitators of the Womb Surround Birth Process begin with defining a set of Principles that Castellino created (White, 2014). These are:

Principle of Mutual Support and Cooperation

Principle of Choice

Principle of the Pause: Self and Co-regulation

Principle of Self Care

Principle of Touch and Attention

Principle of Brief and Frequent Eye Contact

Principle of Confidentiality

Then a specific form is employed so that the process unfolds in a slow, deliberate sequence. The group plays a huge role because the early patterns are often coupled with relationship and family. Skilled facilitators encourage contact with people in the group in a friendly, connected way. The pattern that needs to be explored emerges. Models of group process before the Castellino method sometimes referred to this exploration of early patterns as sacred research. The key to repatterning is the slower pace and group coherency. Facilitators pay attention to relationships in the circle and the feeling tone of the group. There are as many ways to explore a pattern as there are people. As these early imprints emerge, the blueprint for health also emerges.

The Map Versus the Territory

A blueprint for wholeness, health and wellbeing exists in each of us. Therapies that flowed together to support the development of prenatal and perinatal health from its inception promoted energetic and physical healing models. The old osteopaths and polarity therapists like William Sutherland and Dr. Randolph Stone referred to our early roots of health as a blueprint, or a map of human development.

It begins with our genes and then continues with connection. There is a saying in human development: genes are the architect and experience is the carpenter. Other examples of the blueprint lie in our understanding of the autonomic nervous system. We each have within us our capacity to live fully, to have the energy we need to follow our true path, build relationships, pursue our passions, and live well until the end of our days. The deeper health patterns in our bodies are described as tides by the old osteopaths. There are manual therapists trained to feel patterns in the body with their hands and their body.

As the Polyvagal theory, developed by Stephen Porges, has become widely known, we can now also speak in terms of functional nervous system health. We can further define patterns in our bodies as responses to threat or safety. Even embryos have early roots of nervous system function as the patterns for safety and survival begin in the first trimester. Our bodies develop at an amazing rate, recording experiences in the womb. Recent and distant research show that babies have experiences in the womb and that these experiences have lifelong and future generational implications. In fact, we know that the experiences our mothers, grandmothers and sometimes great grandmothers can imprint in our DNA.

Womb Surround facilitators support people to find an early health map of connection, support, safety, protection, and a sense of belonging. Also coupled with this map is deep compassion, love, and a spiritual sense that comes with us as our soul drops into human form. Castellino often refers to this a "stepping down into the Creation." This is our human map. The imprints are the territory. We all live within different territories and their meanings. Each is encoded into our lived experience. Perhaps your territory has elements of our natural response to overwhelming events: fight, flight or freeze. Trained group leaders help find these places and help the

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participant name the experience. In the slow pace, these experiences are titrated so that they are no longer overwhelming, and access to the present, group energy, and the adult consciousness is always there as a resource. Participants are encouraged to feel that the map is always there, but obscured by the overwhelming response still looping in the body. There is the possibility of illuminating the map, draining the stress of the long-ago imprint, and reclaiming, restoring or repairing wholeness.

Embracing our Humanity

Many people don't feel safe in their bodies; that is an imprint. Prenatal and perinatal therapy like the Womb Surround or Somatic Experiencing® by someone trained to understand early trauma offer ways for people to get to these implicit memories and see them for what they are: something that happened long ago frequently even in the previous generation. It is possible to find out who we are in the now and live there. Reclaiming, restoring and repairing our early overwhelming experiences from our very first human connections are among first layers for establishing safety. Castellino brings in the elements of cellular and embryonic development through specific energetic and body-oriented meditations. By slowing the pace, we can experience our human form in relationship to the earth, sky and relationship with others: we are here on the planet in a human form with other human beings. We are spiritual, individual and social beings.

The stories that we know about incarnation can be as simple as answering the questions: Did you want to come into human form? Do you get a sense of what drew you in? What helps you feel more welcome if you sense you were reluctant to come? Those who practice with the intent to heal early traumatic imprints know that we are spiritual beings in a physical body; and babies are the closest beings on the planet to those spiritual planes. Can we remember these places and be embodied, too? Embracing our humanity in our bodies is a big challenge.

Fortunately, we have our biology that we can train. Our social engagement system (cranial nerves V, VII, IX, X, and XI plus the heart) is a unique heart, voice, face connection that interfaces with others. We can work with that in the Womb Surround circles. We know that our facial expression informs our body, and vice versa: the vagus nerve is 80% sensory informing our brain and our neurophysiology of the felt sense of safety (our interoception). The deep neuro-anatomy of our brain reads the environment for signs of danger or safety (our neuroception). This group process evokes the Surround, or how can we come together to create safety and connection. For the person exploring their patterns, the group can begin to represent what happened for them, and the facilitator can resource and reorient the person as well as the group to the difference between the history (that was then), and the present (this is now), and finally, what would be the most healing here. How we are together can heal these early imprints. Participants are taught to track their nervous system, and they gain skills and a new perspective they can carry into the current lives.

This modality is growing in use as qualified practitioners from trainings offered by Castellino are branching out and offering them.

For more information see <http://www.castellinotraining.com> and <http://wombsurroundworkshops.com/>.

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Raymond Castellino, DC (retired), RPP, RPE, RCST®, draws on over four decades of experience as a natural health care practitioner, consultant and teacher. His current practice focuses on the resolution of prenatal, birth and other early trauma and stress. See more about him at <http://www.castellinotraining.com>.