



Chris Bruels

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Introduction to *Trager*

Trager® is a school of movement education also known as somatic education. The name “*Trager*” honors it’s originator Dr Milton Trager who lived from 1908-1997.

Trager is experienced in two forms: client initiated self-care movements and practitioner initiated movements in the client’s body (often referred to as tablework). Both forms use the same quality of movement experience. This quality is physically rhythmic, gently within the available range of motion and incorporating the feelings of ease and lightness.

How it works and what it is useful for

Trager is considered a movement or somatic education because it changes the ways client’s move and use their bodies. Three primary tools are used:

- the direct experience of relaxation
- the development of a body memory that is used as a reference tool
- movements that the client does for their own self care.

Direct experience of relaxation

Chris Bruels’ quality of touch and the rhythmic nature of the movement helps to calm the nervous system, creating a deep level of relaxation. The touch is intended to be gentle, full and open hands that embrace the skin and muscle tissue contours. The movement created penetrates to the bones. The resulting quality of relaxation is useful as stress management, and relieving tension headaches.

One client expressed his experience, “There is nothing to resist in a *Trager* session. It is the most relaxing modality that I have experienced.”

Usable memory

Chris Bruels encourages her clients to notice and express in words, the changes that they are aware of during a *Trager* session. The intention is to develop a conscious memory of the experience in the client’s body. This conscious memory can be recalled at any time by the client to help guide their muscle coordination so as to recreate the *Trager* session experience.

This is the same tool that athletes use to hone their skills. Research has found that if the athlete vividly imagines a “perfect shot” that the brain creates the coordination of muscles to create a “perfect shot” without actually moving the muscles.

Chris’s clients often report being able to access the memory of the *Trager* session to help them relax to go to sleep or to find a better posture when they notice that they are slumped.

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Movements you can do for yourself

Chris Bruels teaches her clients *Trager* mindful movements that they can do on their own. These movements use the same principles as the movement created during the table work portion of a session. These movements are intended to be used when the client becomes aware of tension in their body or poor posture. Even a few seconds can help release the escalation of tension in muscles. The ultimate goal is for client's to have a repertoire of these movements so they can maintain a relaxed experience themselves.

A deeper explanation

Trager calms the nervous system eliciting a relaxation response

The quality of *Trager* touch and movements is deliberately below the pain threshold. This is specifically so that the autonomic nervous system response of “flight, fight or freeze” is not activated. The body system is designed to brace against pain; it is an automatic response. By not engaging this automatic response, Chris is able to move directly towards a relaxation response.

The neurological sensory feedback loops are flooded with positive sensations that can bring relief to the client's system who has been primarily registering pain sensations. This can encourage muscle tension to be released.

As muscles relax, their natural range of motion expands. Chris is able to guide this increased motion to demonstrate to the client the movement that is attainable with a new coordination of their muscles.

The resulting relaxation response gives the client increased blood flow, a calmer nervous system and sense of wellbeing.

Trager intends to improve the client's movement patterns.

Trager practitioners manually initiate specific movements in the client's body to facilitate the reprogramming of the motor centre of the brain.

Postural and movement muscle coordinations are learned primarily through repetition, becoming movement habits. The person is able to use that muscle coordination without specifically thinking about it.

An example is writing words. Once the muscle coordination of writing the individual letters is established as a movement pattern then the person can focus on the words and thoughts being written.

Most often the muscle coordinations are useful and efficient. Sometimes they get distorted, as in the case of poor posture or lingering compensations for injuries that remain active after the injury has healed.

Trager uses the learning tool, kinaesthetic modelling, to interrupt detrimental habitual movements and introduce new movement options. “Kinaesthetic” as it is a direct body experience and “modelling” as it is an example of something new or different.

By using kinaesthetic modelling, *Trager* movements demonstrate to the client what movement options are immediately available within the client's range of motion. This allows the client to integrate changes so that their neuromuscular coordination is not overwhelmed by radical adjustments.

In keeping with how our brains learn new movements, the touch and movements have to feel better than the client's current habit of movement. Chris requires an agreement with her clients that they will tell her as soon as anything is uncomfortable so that she can adjust what she is doing so that it can create the intended quality of experience.

Once the desired change has happened in the client's body, Chris engages the client in articulating their body awareness of the change. This teaching tool makes use of the conscious part of the brain to encourage the motor center of the brain to integrate the desired change. By deliberately recalling the body awareness of the session, the client gives a reference to the motor center of the brain to recreate the positive changes of the session.

Trager supports an accurate proprioceptive experience.

Sometimes a discrepancy between the condition of the body or where it is in space can develop. The client may be repeatedly misjudging their movements resulting in accidents. There may be an emotional response to the client's body that is not based in actuality as in anorexia.

The combination of touch and movements that are within the pain tolerance of the client and the passive reverberation of the movements throughout the client's body, helps the client develop a more accurate proprioceptive sense of themselves. The resulting body awareness becomes a new tool the client can use to be safer and more efficient.

Trager movements look simple and are deliberately created by the practitioner to feel easy. The results can be profound.

Frequently, at the end of a session, clients express an awareness of peace within themselves.

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