

Biography Tool-book

Karl-Heinz Finke





Illustration: 'Banksia Birthday Candles'
All Banksia photos by Karl-Heinz Finke

At the start of each Chapter there is a metamorphosis of Banksias from bud to seed-cone

Biography Tool-book

*Guide to Theory & Practice
of Biography Work*

This Book belongs to

.....

*May you recognise in your life the presence,
power, and light of your soul.
May you realise that you are never alone,
that your soul in its brightness and belonging
connects you intimately with the rhythm of
the universe.*

*May you have respect for your individuality
and difference.
May you realise that the shape of your soul is unique,
that you have a special destiny here,
that behind the façade of your life,
there is something beautiful and eternal happening.*

John O'Donohue
Excerpt from the blessing 'For Solitude' (*Benedictus*, 2009)

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Welcome to the Biography Tool-Book

Here is an essential guide-book to *Biography Work*, from a holistic perspective. It is a practical companion summarising the attitudes, tools and theory needed to be an effective Consultant in *Biography Work*, or to integrate *Biography Work* within other helping professions.

It is based on over 30 years of Karl-Heinz Finke's practical experience as a dedicated Biography Researcher, Consultant and Trainer.

Our approach is holistic, acknowledging the human being as more than a physical being in a material environment. The human being is both physical and spiritual and undergoes an individual journey of development on Earth.

In this approach to *Biography Work*, we look at the developmental steps over a person's life-span and try to make sense of that journey.

In this *Tool-Book*, our focus is to provide tools to assist others to make greater sense of human lives. We aim to provide enough theoretical background so that the tools are practical to use in Consultancy work.

Who is it for?

The dedicated full-time or part-time Biography Consultant will find it a summary and extension of some of the content from their training. It may become an essential guide or resource to deepen ongoing work.

Other professionals interested in human development will find it a good introduction to *Biography Work* so that they can integrate aspects of it into their own work. It is a useful companion for: medical and allied health professionals, counsellors, educators, life coaches, art therapists, and so on.

Why has it been written?

The Author, Karl-Heinz Finke has completed over thirty 3-year Training Programs world-wide, while maintaining his Consultancy practice in Berlin, 'on-the-road' and online. His own training for this work is extensive.

He has long wanted to share the fruits of his learning and his practical experience with groups and individuals more widely. This *Tool-book* is the result. It demanded to be written and grew extensively in the writing of it!

The two of us worked together to write and publish the *Biography Log-book*, as an introductory text. This is a follow-up book that allows Karl-Heinz to share more of what we apply in our Training Programs. It is for anyone wanting to deepen their understanding of *Biography Work* for personal and/or professional development. Many aspects of *Biography Work* are described in enough detail to be useful.

How can it be used?

There is a wide-range of material in this book. Our approach has been to use broad headings for each *Chapter*, and then give sufficient details to understand the specific topics in each *Part*. Topics may relate to attitudes or approaches or concepts, practical tools or techniques. We have included quotes and verses useful for teaching, consultancy work and self-care. We have tried to make it easy to navigate to any topic of interest.

Read the book or scan its content from cover to cover – we trust you find it an interesting read. You can easily navigate specific topics by referring to the Table of Contents or by using the Bookmarks of the PDF in the eBook version. You will find interesting external links within the eBook. All sources have been referenced, either within the text or in the Reference section at the end.

As Editor, Laura Summerfield has had much joy in editing this learning material so that it is comprehensive, informative, accessible, readable and useful.

We wish you well as you use this *Biography Tool-Book*. It was written with love and gratitude for the many gifts that Anthroposophy and *Biography Work* have brought both of us over many years.

Warm greetings from Canberra, Australia

Karl-Heinz Finke and Laura Summerfield

Chapter 1 – Observing, Reflecting and Listening



Illustration: Flowering Banksia

Quote: Self-knowledge and World-knowledge

Self-knowledge and world-knowledge must be truths that mutually support each other. And of this nature, moving to and fro in a pendulum motion, are the truths that are attained by the philosophy of the world and of life I am here describing: as self-knowledge and as world-knowledge. The two sentences in which I should like to sum this up are the following:

If you would know yourself, seek yourself in the universe; if you would know the world, penetrate your own depths. Your own depths will reveal to you, as in a world-memory, the secrets of the cosmos.

Rudolf Steiner, GA83 ¹

This *Biography Tool-book* is an essential compendium of ideas and practical tools that make a difference in *Biography Work*.

We start by clarifying the basics from a holistic or spiritual perspective:

- Preferred terms to use
- Basic techniques to master
- Self-reflection for self-development
- Attitudes to explore and master
- Conversational skills to practise
- Health-based perspective
- Phenomenological approach

We invite you to enrich your relationships with others, as well as increase compassion and effectiveness within your Consultancy work, by applying these concepts, attitudes and tools.

1.1 Self-reflection – The 'Number 1' Tool

Reflection Time is like the pause between the notes, it creates the music.
Or, as a still valid echo from ancient mysteries puts it: Know thyself!

Guiding Image: Reflection Time – Putting life on hold

Create moments of inner peace for yourself, and in these moments learn to distinguish the essential from the inessential. ... As students of the spirit, we must set aside a brief period of time in daily life in which to focus on things that are quite different from the objects of our daily activity. The kind of activity we engage in must also differ from what occupies the rest of our day. This is not to say, however, that what we do in the minutes we have set aside is unconnected with the content of our daily work. On the contrary, we soon realize that, if approached in the right way, such moments give us the full strength for completing our daily tasks. We need not fear that following this rule will actually take time away from our duties. If someone really cannot spare any more time, five minutes a day are sufficient. What matters is how those five minutes are used.

Inspired by Rudolf Steiner: *How to Know Higher Worlds* (GA10) ²

There are many reasons to *put daily life on hold* and review what we are engaged in. We can reflect on the importance of our activities and thereby gain insights about our future steps.

In *Occult Science* (GA13) Steiner introduces a slightly different practice, a daily review in reverse order. It seems that in the first practice (above) there is an impetus on distinguishing the essential from the non-essential. In the second, the strengthening of thought and familiarisation with the spiritual world is emphasised. The first may be more directed towards biographical review, the second more towards spiritual development.

The Backward Review or Rueckschau Practice

The ability to behold one's own experiences, one's own joys and sorrows as though they were the joys and sorrows of others is a good preparation for spiritual training. One gradually attains the necessary degree of this quality if, after one has finished one's daily tasks, one permits the panorama of one's daily experiences to pass before the eyes of the spirit. One must see oneself in a picture within one's experiences; that is, one must observe oneself in one's daily life as though from outside. One attains a certain ability in such self-observation if one begins with the visualization of detached portions of this daily life. One then becomes increasingly clever and skilful in such retrospect, so that, after a longer period of practice, one will be able to form a complete picture within a brief span of time. This looking at one's experiences backward has a special value for spiritual training for the reason that it brings the soul to a point where it is able to release itself in thinking from the previous habit of merely following in thought the course of everyday events. In thought-retrospect one visualizes correctly, but one is not held to the sensory course of events. One needs this exercise to familiarize oneself with the spiritual world. Thought strengthens itself in this way in a healthy manner. It is therefore also good not only to review in retrospect one's daily life, but to retrace in reverse order, for instance, the course of a drama, a narrative, or a melody.—More and more it will become the ideal for the student to relate themselves to the life events they encounter in such a way that, with inner certainty and soul tranquillity, they allow these events to approach them and do not judge the events according to their own soul condition, but according to the event's inner significance and inner value. It is just by looking upon this ideal that the student will create for themselves the soul basis for the surrender of themselves to ... meditations on symbolic and other thoughts and feelings. (GA13) ³

We have added the quotation above as the source that explains the character of this review practice, frequently mentioned by Rudolf Steiner.

Biographical Reflection Time

In both practices, *Reflection Time* is suggested for students of the spirit, people who consciously pursue a path of inner development. But what about everyone else? In our understanding every human being, and the earth and cosmos, are in development or as Steiner puts it *in becoming*. If we add developmental practices to our daily life, our development is quickened and the core of our being and our 'I' are nourished. This nourishment facilitates the development of new organs of perception in us and can support our other activities.

At work, *Reflection Time* can help us become more effective. It helps us to have an overview, to *prioritise* and become pro-active, instead of being carried along by the stream of tasks and obligations. Take a reflective moment at the start of the day to prioritise. Make an *appointment with yourself* in the middle of the day and have a short *evaluation and preview* at the end of the work-day. You can add *Reflection Time*, prioritisation, evaluation and preview to a weekly, monthly or yearly rhythm. Have a look at Stephen Covey's book: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.⁴

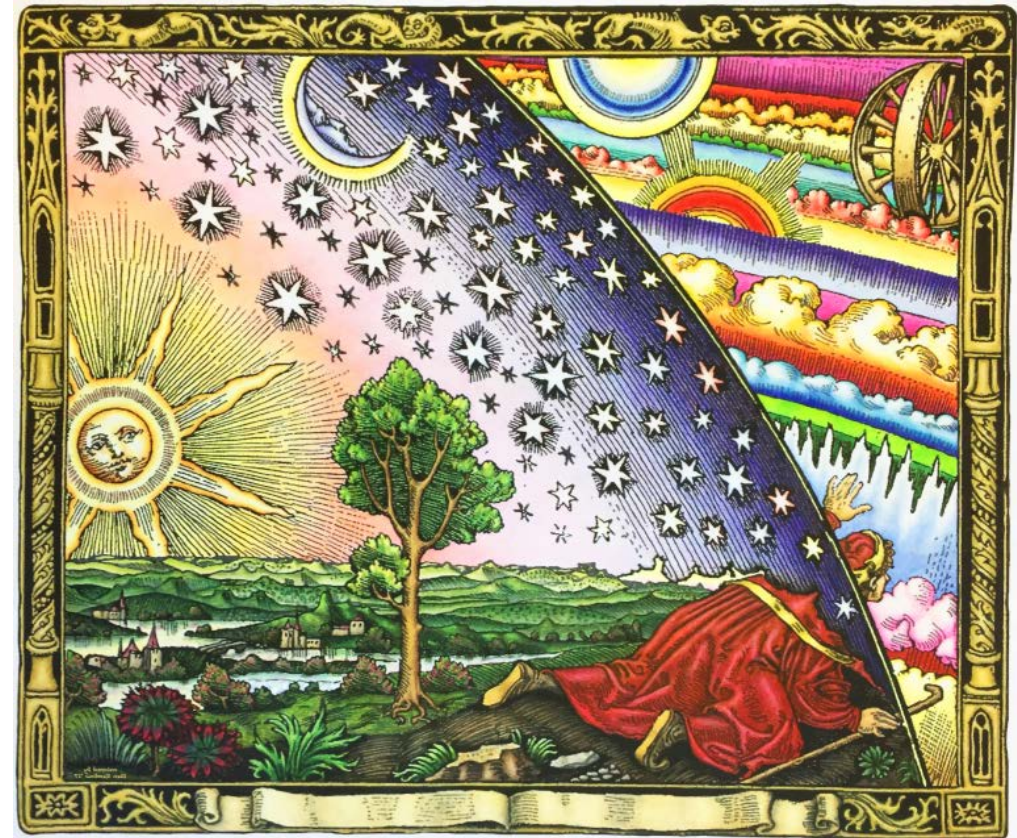
Biography Work is Reflection Time applied to reviewing our life.

At challenging times, turning points, or in decisive moments we can *put daily life on hold* and consider our next step before we react. In most cases we can do this self-reflective activity on our own, but at other times when we feel out of our depth or emotionally overwhelmed, we can ask for professional help. This is what Biographical Consultants are trained for, to be a Companion and accompany someone in review of their life; in realising where they are now, visualising where they want to go, and finding the first steps onward.

The presence of a good listener and another 'I' helps to create and hold a space for *Biographical Reflection Time*. Depending on individual circumstances or the issue at hand, this does not always require a whole life overview, but sufficient information to understand and be *in the picture*. Within that space helpful *Imaginations* can emerge.

Self-reflection has the potential to open up new horizons, so we can see and think outside the box created by habits, expectations and convenience.

Illustration: New Horizons



Camille Flammarion (1888) – Coloured by Hugo Heikenwaelder (1998) CC

1.2 Some Basics

Terms and Basic Techniques.

Preferred Terms

1 *Speaker and Companion*

We prefer to use the following terms in the context of *Biography Work*, following indications by Coenraad van Houten.⁵

Speaker, Person, or Client instead of *Patient*.

Biography Work needs active participation of the Client.

Companion or Consultant instead of *Therapist*.

Biography Work establishes a learning process and not a therapeutic process, but can have therapeutic *side-effects*.

Coenraad van Houten worked with the concept that the Speaker is the specialist in their issues, even though they are a major contributor in creating or re-creating their issues.

2 *The Observer's Perspective*

As Companion and Speaker, we stay as much as possible in the **Observer's** or **Bird's-eye Perspective**.

We sometimes use the following metaphor to describe this process:

Imagine that I accompany you on a guided tour through your biography, your life journey. You remember what happened, but you don't re-live or re-enact what you once experienced. You observe it as though it is the journey of a dear friend, learning and growing.

Basic Techniques

1 *Find Key Questions – Use Questions as Keys*

The use of **Key questions**⁶, which relate to different Life Phases and their archetypal developmental challenges, can be very helpful, especially if the Speaker has a strong tendency to enter into and re-live their experiences. Addressing the key questions interrupts the reflection or sharing of experiences

sequentially, and therefore supports the Observer's perspective. However, asking too many questions can disrupt the Speaker's narrative and the upwelling of their memories. We aim for a balanced approach that supports the process of sharing, the Speaker themselves and the content that they want to share.

2 *Differentiate Incident and Experience*

As we listen to the Speaker we try to distinguish life **Incidents** from life **Experiences** and encourage the Speaker to do the same.

The **Incidents** are about the facts, or what happens *outside* the Speaker. They describe what happened – where, when and with whom.

The **Experiences** are more about the *inside* of the Speaker – the feelings, resonances, associations, and memories related to the incident.

With challenging incidents or phases, it may be helpful to start with the *outside or incident*. The *inside or experience* can then be shared a little later as an extra process.

This technique is reflected in the frame-work of the **Charts** developed specifically for *Biography Work*. Our Charts have three main columns: Life Years, Life incidents, and Life experiences.

For more information on the use of our Charts, see **Chapters 3 & 4**.

3 *Use Phases or Septennials to Order Life Data*

Biography Work orders life data using a developmental frame-work of 9 or 12 phases. Based on biographical theory, each phase consists of 7 Life Years or **Septennials**. We have developed special charts to support this ordering process. We note the **Critical Life Years** within each life phase.