

WHY I NO LONGER TEACH BRADLEY METHOD™ CLASSES

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I loved my Bradley™ class when I was pregnant. Every week for 12 weeks, I would lug my ever-expanding belly to class in order to learn how to have a natural birth with my husband-coach.. Every week I would leave class with my head filled with new information. I learned about the changes my body would go through during labor, ways to keep my body relaxed so my uterus could do it's job, tips on how to stay hydrated in order to avoid the first domino falling, leading to the cascade of interventions, how to advocate (or fight) for a natural birth, and how to stand firm in the face of the unnatural environment of the hospital. Having never given birth before, I thought I was preparing myself for labor. I believed that all I needed to do was arm myself with knowledge, and I would have the natural birth I hoped for.

Then I was initiated into motherhood... I gave birth. WOW! It was HARD! It wasn't the beautiful natural birth that I thought I would have. No. I wasn't peaceful. I wasn't relaxed. I wasn't calm. I was scared. I was nervous. I was impatient. I was worried. But I was healthy, and I had a healthy baby, so that's all that mattered, right? I began my new life as a mother, humbled by my daughter's birth, and trying to make sense of a birth that didn't go as planned. As part of moving through this difficult time, I decided to become a Bradley™ instructor. At this point, I still believed it was the best way to prepare someone for natural childbirth, and maybe someone could benefit from my experience.

I began my life in birth work as a Bradley Method™ instructor. With each 12-week class, I supplied tons of information to my students. While doing so, I kept thinking that I would bring more heart and soul to my classes to balance out all the information that the Bradley Method is known for. I loved each and every one of my students. I wanted them to have the birth they hoped and wished for. I wanted them to feel loved and encouraged and confident going into birth.

Because of the time spent together in class, couples developed relationships with each other and with me. They would call me after their baby was born and let me know of the exciting news. These stories usually followed the same pattern: How their labor started, when they went to the hospital, how long contractions were, how long labor lasted etc. Some were natural. Some were not. For those who did not have a natural birth, which is the entire goal of The Bradley Method™, this phone call would often begin with the same phrase, said in a disappointed voice: "Well, we didn't have the perfect Bradley™ birth, but our baby is healthy, and we..." Then they'd go on to talk about the baby. Not much more information was given about their labor. I could almost feel the shame and regret seep through the phone. With each of these calls, my heart sank, because I knew from experience just how they felt... like a failure.

One day I was talking to a friend and lamenting that parents feel like they've somehow failed if they didn't achieve their "perfect Bradley™ Birth". I wondered how I could approach classes differently to take away this pressure. She handed me the Birthing From Within© book and suggested that it might resonate with me. I shook my head, not sure. After all, wasn't that all about doing ART and crazy, "airy-fairy" stuff? I mean come on, how could any of that stuff actually prepare anyone for the HARD work of labor?!

She assured me that it was different from what I thought. I was skeptical, but gave it a chance. I took the book home, and over the course of the next week, devoured it cover to cover. Sure enough, the book completely resonated with me. (Well, almost all of it. I still wasn't sure about the Birth Art stuff... but I kept an open mind!) With each new article I read on the website, I would nod my head and say to myself, "Yes, yes, yes!" Within the next six months, I had decided to take the Introductory Workshop and become a Birthing From Within© Mentor! My new journey had begun.

So what was it, exactly, that shifted me from being a Bradley Method™ Instructor to a Birthing From Within© Mentor?

Method or Philosophy?

The best place to start is with semantics. The Bradley Method™ is a METHOD, which means: *a particular form of procedure for accomplishing or approaching something, orderliness of thought or behavior; systematic planning or action.*

This means that there is a certain intended outcome. In this case, a natural birth. By learning a certain "method" it implies that there is a right way and a wrong way to accomplish that outcome.

Birthing from Within© is based on a PHILOSOPHY, which means: *a theory or attitude held by a person or organization that acts as a guiding principle for behavior.*

In a nutshell, the [Birthing From Within© philosophy](#) is a way of thinking about birth and birth preparation in order to be prepared for ANY birth outcome: natural, medicated, surgical etc. The Birthing From Within© philosophy resonated more with me because I learned that birth cannot be fully planned for. While you can hope for and envision a certain kind of birth, you really have no control over the outcome of your birth. The Birthing From Within© approach prepares parents to deal with and cope with unexpected events when/if they arise.

The Pain and Intensity of Labor

Coping with the pain and intensity of labor was another area that shifted for me. As a Bradley™ student and then instructor, we spent a small portion of each class in relaxation. The idea is that relaxing in labor leads to less tension, which leads to less pain, which leads to less fear, which leads to less tension and so on. This sounds great, and it works for some. But what if the way

you cope with labor does NOT look or feel relaxing? What if your coping mechanism is loud moaning or rocking? What if you absolutely CANNOT relax? Then what do you do?!

Birthing From Within's© approach to pain coping feels more realistic to me. Thirty to forty- five minutes of each class is set aside for learning and practicing different pain-coping strategies. These practices teach you how to cope with the intensity of labor when it goes beyond what you think you can handle. It allows for the times in labor when “just relax and breathe” won't cut it anymore. Parents walk away from class feeling much more confident in their ability to cope with the actual pain of labor, rather than just feeling more relaxed.

Fathers and Partners

The role of the father/partner was another big shift for me. I remember my husband looking at me after one of our Bradley™ classes and saying, “So let me get this straight. I am your coach, and I am going to coach you to do something that I have never done, and can never do. And you are going to be relying on me, right?” I nodded an emphatic “Yes!”. I wanted him by my side. He wanted to be by my side. We knew he couldn't give birth physically, but whatever he could do, he was going to do it! I felt good because now I had a coach (or, more honestly, a protector from all of the “unnecessary interventions” at the hospital). Talk about pressure on him! What I discovered I REALLY wanted from my husband was for him to fully BE THERE. I wanted him to hold my hand, or rub my feet, get me a drink, or whatever the moment called for. Birthing from Within prepares dads/ partners to do just that. They are given a host of tools that they can use so they can contribute and be useful, but more importantly, they are taught how to truly BE with their love in labor. No pressure. No coaching. When a laboring mom feels this calming presence during labor, she is able to fully let go, immerse herself in Laborland and allow her labor to unfold as it will.

Nuts-N-Bolts of Labor

Bradley™ classes are heavy with information and are lecture based. If you want to know the latest study, or what the statistics say, this is a class for you. But there is so much more to labor preparation than the information. All the practical knowledge you need to know to have a healthy birth covered in a Birthing From Within© class, but the framework is a little different than you might expect. Through a combination of group discussion, role-plays, pain coping practice, birth art, and direct teaching, your whole being is nurtured. The aim of Birthing From Within© is to prepare your mind, body, AND your heart for labor. Having been through childbirth, I know how important it is to have practical knowledge. But you also have to know yourself and understand the deeper emotional side of birth. Birthing From Within© supports all aspects of giving birth.

Birth Art

I'll be honest, this was a tough one for me to swallow. When I first started mentoring my classes, I still wasn't sure how creating art was going to fit into childbirth preparation in a real and

practical way. Slowly, with an open mind, I discovered that it really is NOT about the art or the final product, it's about the process. Much of Bradley™ childbirth preparation is left-brained and information driven. However, much of labor is right-brained (intuitive, creative, non-analytical). By immersing yourself in the process of art, you activate the right side of your brain, the side that leads you to *Laborland*. No wonder I couldn't remember anything I learned in my Bradley™ class when I went into labor! By spending time in the Right Brain, new insights and bits of self-knowledge are allowed to arise which can have a positive impact on the way you prepare for your birth. I have become a convert to the artistic process as a great tool for childbirth preparation. In fact, I believe that to truly provide holistic preparation, one MUST include some kind of art or creating.

Mentor Vs. Teacher

Before I taught Bradley™ classes, I was a 5th grade teacher. In fact, I knew I wanted to be an Elementary school teacher since I was about 15 years old. I had family members who were teachers, so I guess you could say being a teacher was in my bones! However, what I loved most about teaching was the connection and relationships I built with my students. Teaching Bradley™ classes left little room to explore the nuances of each student's individual needs. I was to stick to the 12-week outline and cram as much information into each class as possible. Meeting parents where they were, and changing the curriculum to meet their needs just wasn't heard of. I tried, boy did I try... but it felt impossible with all the information needed to be covered. When I discovered that Birthing From Within© approaches learning from the point of view of a "mentor", it completely resonated with my heart. So... what IS the difference between a TEACHER and a MENTOR?

A MENTOR:

Has all the qualities of a teacher
Is closely observing students
Is listening deeply
Is using instinct as much
as information
Is addressing what's coming up, not what's
in the teaching notes
Is speaking to the mother's heart and from
the Mentor's heart
Is asking questions to get the mother
to find her own answers
Walks alongside you on your journey

A TEACHER:

Imparts knowledge
Is the top of a hierarchy
Inspires as a role model
Educates
Delivers information
Uses a patriarchal model

In my journey from Bradley Method™ teacher to Birthing From Within© mentor, I have seen first-hand the benefit of holistic childbirth preparation. Parents who take my Birthing From Within© class are less tied to a specific birth outcome. When birth doesn't go as hoped for, they don't feel like a failure or ashamed because they should have made a different choice. They feel

connected to themselves, their partner and their baby. They are humbled by the power of birth and proud of the process that they have gone through. They are more confident parents because they know how to cope with intense situations and how to move through them in awareness.