

## CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE

Heidrun Essler, René Veugelers, Simon Kilner  
*International Board for the Coordination of Children Focusing*

---

### THE GOAL IS A GENERATION OF CHILDREN WHO GROW UP FOCUSING.

*Children are the future and Children who Focus are the future of Focusing. The goal is a generation of children who grow up Focusing. They behave and relate to others in ways that are felt sensed and congruent. This radical vision of early empowerment (and not later repair) we are naming “Children Focusing”. It needs to be seen widely as our answer to problems faced by children, their caregivers, and professionals.*

*Right now, Children Focusing is in transition towards the development of national and international support networks. There is a strong foundation of commitment, energy and activity in Children Focusing today, and yet many activists are working alone or in small groups. Moving towards the goal requires the creation of more effective structures. People helping children to Focus and the greater Focusing Community both need to find ways to create more drive and belonging within International Children Focusing.*

*This article is structured to survey the present situation, and then outline the difficulties, goals, and ways forward. The format is based on the problem solving questions of: Why are we writing this article? Where are we? Where do we want to be? What are the possible steps? What can you do? There is a summary of key points at the beginning of each section.*

### WHY ARE WE WRITING THIS ARTICLE?

USE OF INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP FOCUSING PROCESS IS ESSENTIAL TO THE ETHOS AND PRACTICE OF TRANSFORMATION

#### Key Points

- Children Focusing is what we want to have happen.
- Children Focusing is a powerful name because it is a descriptive action statement and goal.
- The use of the Focusing process is at the heart of change in the organisation of Children Focusing at an international level.
- Children Focusing activists are working all over the world, in many areas of child development, and in many languages.
- The International Children Focusing Community needs more drive.
- The priority is to identify and resolve difficulties with communication in the International Children Focusing.

Those who live in the energy of Children Focusing know that it is a profound life skill that can be nurtured in children. Children Focusing is more than adults Focusing with children. It is empowering individual children to grow up open to the guidance of their felt senses. We have adjusted the name 'Children's Focusing' to 'Children Focusing' because it is an action statement that describes the fundamental goal. The pathways to this goal are simple but challenging. First, bring more adults to an understanding of the advantages that Focusing can bring to them and the children in their lives. Second, spread the skills in adults and children, so that the advantages can be demonstrated. Third, facilitate people involved in Children Focusing across the world to effectively support each other.

The coordination of International Children Focusing was passed to us (the authors) from Marta Stapert one year ago. This brought a special responsibility for supporting the transformation of Children Focusing into the future. We are conscious that our own individual and group Focusing process is essential to the ethos and practice of this transformation, and that inclusion, respect, balance, and effectiveness are our guiding principles. Throughout the world, many people, past and present, have built strong individual foundations by helping children to Focus, yet most are working alone or in small regional groups. There are only a few countries with national organisations, and as a result, the International Children Focusing Community is, as yet, small and fragmented.

One original aim of this article was to describe the different activities around Children Focusing in the world. To this end, with the full support of the Focusing Institute, we wrote to the Discussion Lists to call for people to describe their work, however small. An automatic online response form was set up on the Children Focusing Corner Website with a simple link from the Homepage. Up to the time of writing this article, we have only had about ten responses, and therefore have revised the aim of our article. It has become clear that to lay solid foundations for future development, our priority must be to identify and remedy the barriers to communication within International Children Focusing. To that end, the survey form remains to collect information over a longer period of time. Our aim is for it to be translated into other languages and responses from non-English speaking individuals put into English.

## **WHERE ARE WE?**

### **PEOPLE WORKING IN CHILDREN FOCUSING ARE TOO ISOLATED**

#### **Key Points**

- People working in Children Focusing do not talk with each other sufficiently.
- Reliance on English is a structural barrier excluding many people helping children to Focus.
- National and special interest groups are not strong enough to support the diverse applications of Children Focusing for different developmental ages and fields of child support.
- Children Focusing has a requirement to communicate with children, policy makers and those responsible for the safety of children.

## SOME FACTS

The survey responses that we received catalogued work being done in Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, USA, Switzerland, Canada, UK, and France. These are in areas as diverse as working with parents, teachers, teenage girls, groups of 6-14 year olds, preschoolers and nursery schools. However, we know that there are many more people helping children to Focus throughout the world.

- 152 people are subscribed to the Children's Discussion List. This is clearly not enough to generate consistent vibrant contributions.
- There are 67 articles from 41 authors available on the Children's Website. However, only one of these contributions has been written since 2001. Various articles were published in a Hungarian/English booklet Fokusz-Tanulmányok in 2006, but these are not available on the website as yet.
- The 1997 Folio published articles on Focusing with children from infancy to teenagers, classroom approaches, art and play therapy. The 1993 Folio included articles about children and play.
- Various articles about Children Focusing have appeared in "Staying in Focus".
- Five International Conferences for Children Focusing have taken place over ten years. These have had approximately 200 participants.
- Adults helping children to Focus are living in 16 countries — and these are only the people we know.
- The Children Focusing Corner currently has a budget of 1074,27 Euros which is insufficient for the work we are facing.

## COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

Unfortunately, the number of people who are responding to the existing communication structures do not create a sense of dynamism. The present international structures are a conference every two years, the Discussion List, and the Website. Children Focusing Conferences are small — 25-40 people are a common attendance. Participants come mainly from the host nation and the surrounding countries. Clearly, many people involved in helping children to Focus find it hard to attend conferences. We believe the small size of conferences is also a result of a more underlying issue that effects all communication in Children Focusing. Many non-English speaking people are excluded from Children Focusing communication structures as English is the primary language of sharing. Our present assumption is that many, or most, people helping children to Focus do not feel confident speaking English

In addition, it is possible that computer literacy and access are also barriers to the crucial sharing structures, such as the internet-based Website and Discussion List.

## **PERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

The Children Focusing Community is concerned that too many people are working in isolation. Some of the difficulties may lie in the effects of how Children Focusing has developed historically. Centres of activity in Children Focusing tend to be small and geographically far apart. They have tended to look within themselves for support. The development of a network of Children Focusing Coordinators is only just beginning and their place within the community of general Focusing Coordinators is still underdeveloped. In the general Focusing Community, national organisations and special interest groups have come together within an existing international network where they feel a sense of belonging, but this is not the case with Children Focusing. Even though we know there are varying degrees of national organisation in Canada, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Romania, Suriname, the Netherlands and UK, each with individuals who have a sense of their place in the International Focusing Community, these small groups and individuals have not been coordinated enough to drive the Children Focusing Community forward.

Perhaps many people involved in Children Focusing have not yet considered the benefits of being part of an international community. Or it is possible that they have not conceived of the initial steps that they might make to be more involved internationally. Perhaps they have not yet found the space, in the busy demands of their current work, to give time to such a vision.

Moreover, Children Focusing has not yet developed special interest groups within itself to reflect the variety of skills for working with different ages, from babies to teenagers. Further, we have few shared descriptions of the varied approaches needed in the key fields of childcare and development, such as education, health, social care, and family. The special interests groups currently existing are, at best in nascent stages.

## **LIFE CONDITIONS**

We recognise employment, culture, and self-image as another set of barriers to a large-scale Children Focusing community. Many people helping children to Focus are employed with relatively low incomes. They may be parents or grandparents. Travelling is limited by finances and holidays that are not always consistent during different times of year. There is not a world of self-determined work schedules and subsidised or tax deductible expenses for international conferences. Another consideration is that many Children Focusers are not comfortable presenting their very real skills in the daunting arena of an international, multi lingual community.

## **RESTRICTED VISIONS**

The first area of restricted vision is within the general Focusing Community. We are concerned that many Focusing professionals, trainers and coordinators are not actively seeking to promote the benefits and skills of adults helping children to Focus.

The second area of restricted vision lies outside the Focusing Community. There are obviously many people working with children who have not yet heard of Children Focusing, let alone the kind of future it could bring to the children in their care. This target group is massive, and can be divided into areas such education, health, social care and family. Within that are further age related groups. Gaining access to the gatekeepers in these areas requires Children Focusing to demonstrate simple, safe, and cost effective answers to the problems that present themselves in different areas.

## **WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?**

CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD AND CHILDREN WHO FOCUS ARE THE FUTURE OF FOCUSING.

### **Key Points**

- Children have the opportunity of growing up empowered by Focusing.
- Children Focusing is common place in every area of child development.
- We have effective regional, national and international communication structures.
- Children Focusing is understood as an answer to problems faced by children, their caregivers, and professionals.
- The words, *Children are the Future*, are regularly on the lips and in the writings of prominent and active members of the Focusing Community and beyond.
- The attitudes, skill set, and language of Focusing are commonplace in every area of child development.

In order for the rich rewards of Children Focusing to be widespread and articulated, extensive and active regional, national and international Children Focusing communication structures must be designed for the needs and characteristics of people who are involved in Children Focusing. We must have a language of Children Focusing that caregivers and children of all ages can understand.

## **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE STEPS?**

TO EMPOWER CHILDREN TO FOCUS, WE MUST REACH THE ADULTS TO TEACH CHILDREN FOCUSING.

### **Key Points**

- It is a priority that we develop interconnecting groups of people for coordination, advice, support, and outreach.
- Key communications need to be translated in more languages.
- Children Focusing needs to be widely understood as part of the theory and practice of person-centred child development.
- Marketing approaches need to give clear answers to the problems faced by children and their caregivers.

## COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

The job of the international coordination of Children Focusing is to create communication structures that promote our vision. First, it is important to acknowledge the existing structures that are already in place to maintain and develop communication in Children Focusing. Second, International Children Focusing requires more sharing of activity and day-to-day roles. For example, in addition to International Coordinators, we might organize

- A Circle of Trustees
- National and Special Interest Coordinators
- Individual or shared roles supporting translation, web-site design and updating, discussion list and newsletter activity, financial management
- Advisors to support specific areas such as research, community development, marketing, training

Such a coordinated organizational structure could develop more clear and effective lines of communication between many levels of people who are, or could be, helping children to Focus. It has taken us a year to begin to develop ourselves, as International Coordinators, into a strong team with effective, Focusing-based working practices. This process is not finished yet.

## WEBSITE

The development of the Children Focusing Corner Website into a modern, user-friendly and two-way resource is a crucial long-term objective. We have had great support from The Focusing Institute in the adjustments we have made so far. The site needs complete redevelopment and someone who can manage the day to day changes that an interactive energetic website requires. The site needs to include at least:

- An attractive and simple navigation system and face
- Up-to-date academic articles exploring Children Focusing in different areas of application
- Reports of good practice for different interest groups
- Contacts to teachers, practitioners and coordinators for different countries and areas of interest
- Regular news updates
- Accessible archives
- Evidence of effective work done, such as quotes from children and adults

We need funding and skilled persons to effectively approach the required redesign and everyday management.

## DISCUSSION LIST

At the moment we are studying how to make the Discussion List more vital with more people contributing — including non-English speaking individuals. Of course, moderating a multilingual discussion list would be nearly impossible, but it may be possible to build a system where areas of discussion are summarised in many languages to allow interested individuals to target areas of interest.

## CONFERENCES

Currently, there is an interest in holding International Children Focusing Conferences in Canada, Netherlands, and Israel to follow this year's conference in Hungary. This is wonderful and very encouraging. We also wish to develop other group formats, such as regional gatherings, which would more effectively use time, energy, and money — and reach more people.

## TRAINING AND QUALITY

There are training projects for adults helping children to Focus in countries including Canada, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Romania, Suriname, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and USA. More courses are planned in Argentina, Greece, and Spain.

National trainers clearly want to be independent and flexible — and this is to be encouraged. We wish to share common standards and approaches within International Children Focusing so we need flexible and individual training styles and equivalents, and clear training standards. These standards will be a requirement for gatekeepers in institutions, politics, and funding and have to be specific for different countries.

Another area we wish to see growing is the incorporation of Children Focusing approaches and promotion within primarily adult training courses. At the International Conferences we have already seen more attention to approaches similar to Children Focusing, such as symbolisation through pictures, collages, and movements.

Existing general Focusing events such as the *Summer School* and *Weeklong* can provide a model for growing Children Focusing interest groups in areas such as: education, health, social care, and family.

Children Focusing requires a greater research base, in order to develop evidence for the effectiveness of Focusing, while placing Children Focusing within child development and learning theory. There are areas where Focusing already touches existing theories and practice. Focusing is rooted in the person-centred movement. Individual learning pathways are now widely considered to be foundational for child-development in education, health, social care, and the family. Important roots lie in Rogers' approaches to person centred learning and trust of the learner's own process (Rogers, 1969, 1982). Multi sensory learning is central to accepted learning and teaching practice. Focusing is by definition multi sensory and experiential, because it blends cognition through awareness of touch, vision and hearing. Experiential learning and giving learning personal meaning are part of the work of Claxton (1985).

Focusing improves the understanding of the learning relationship. It brings skills for helping others learn, and as well, in managing personal uncertainty. How learning can be structured, to help the learner/student to take personal ownership has been studied by Vygotsky (Bruner, 1990 and Wood, 1988). Vygotsky's concept of a 'zone proximal development', proposes that learning occurs at the edge of what is already known. This is a practice familiar to every Focuser.

Focusing has much to offer in acknowledging the role of feelings in learning. Goleman proposes a curriculum to develop 'Emotional Intelligence' to prepare young people for life (1996). Le Doux gives this a neural science research base (1996). These ideas are increasingly informing personal and social child development curricula. Schools are seeking effective and simple approaches to develop their practice. Children Focusing has tools to assist in the development of personal and social skills in learners.

At the highest political and policy levels movements such as "*Every Child Matters*" in the UK, are linking social, educational and family support within a child centred framework ([www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)). There are similar movements in other countries. Workers are seeking methods to put government policy into practice in pediatric health care, family support, and school. Within these areas the Focusing method has the potential to gain such government support.

In this article we can only touch on possible areas of Focusing applications. We need people who can articulate Focusing theory and practice, in order to develop a role for Children Focusing in education, health, social care, and the family.

## MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Children Focusing requires strategic marketing and promotion across all fields related to child development .

The promotion of Children Focusing requires approaches that target children, carers, academics, politicians, managers and fund-holders. At the marketing level it must lay out the benefits, safety, and methods in simple language, which is clear and attractive. As we talk to different target audiences we also need a language that they can understand. This should give achievable solutions to their immediate problems. Focusing is an approach that fits well into developmental models that are individual, preventative, skill based, and socially responsible. Statements of effectiveness need to give evidence of the beneficial experiences of adult and child clients. These can take the form of short quotes, case studies, research data and books.

One example is the English publication of Marta Stapert's book (Stapert and Verliefde, 2008) which advances the profile of Children Focusing, helping English speaking people to get an overview of Children Focusing and practical skills to work with children.

A marketing strategy to address these issues needs a lot of careful development. We will be giving time and thought to this area. We will be looking for statements and 'slogans' that might appeal to children on the street, parents in their living rooms, or managers in their offices. Examples of this might be "Children Focusing helps you make friends and decisions" or "Children Focusing unlocks a mysterious force within you that brings wisdom."

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Will you notice inside what is being moved by reading this article?
- Can you recognise what blocks you from taking more action to support Children Focusing internationally?
- Will you ask a question on the discussion list?
- Can you answer a question on the discussion list?
- Will you translate?
- Can you help with the Website?
- Will you include Children Focusing more in your work?
- Can you include Children Focusing more in your training?
- Will you use Focusing more with the children in your life?

Or maybe you have your own way of doing things for Children Focusing. LET US KNOW.

***Children are the future and Children who Focus are the future of Focusing.***

## REFERENCES

- Bruner, J. (1990). Vygotsky. A historical and conceptual perspective. In J. Wersch (Ed.) *Culture, communication and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Claxton, G. (1985). The psychology of teaching educational psychology. In H. Francis (Ed.), *Learning to teach: Psychology in teacher training*. London: Falmer Press.
- Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Le Doux, J.E. (1996). *The emotional brain: The mysterious underpinnings of emotional life*. New York: Touchstone.
- Rogers, C. (1969). *Freedom to learn*. Columbus Ohio: Merrill.
- Rogers, C. (1982). *A social psychology of schooling*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Tomlinson, P. and Kilner, S.F. (undated). *Flexible learning and flexible teaching: The flexible learning framework and current educational theory*. Moorfoot Sheffield: Employment Department. Available online at <http://web.mac.com/martinowen/iWeb/Flexible%3DPersonal/0%20Flexible%20Learning.html>
- Stapert, M. and Verliefde, E. (2008). *Focusing with children: The art of communicating with children at school and at home*. Ross-on Wye: PCCS Books.

Weiser Cornell, A. (2005). *The radical acceptance of everything: Living a focusing life*. Berkley: Calluna Press.

Wood, D. (1988). *How children think and learn*. London: Blackwell.

[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)

[www.focusing.org/open\\_space/12IFCOpenSpaceReport10.htm](http://www.focusing.org/open_space/12IFCOpenSpaceReport10.htm)

