

THE FOLIO

A JOURNAL FOR FOCUSING
AND EXPERIENTIAL THERAPY

Volume 25, Number 1, 2014

FOCUSING AND... CROSSINGS AND INTEGRATIONS

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THE FOLIO

A Journal for Focusing and Experiential Therapy

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INFORMATION

Hard-bound copies of the Folio are available at a reduced rate for members of the Focusing Institute whose dues are fully paid

ORDERING THE FOLIO

To order hard copies of this edition of the Folio please go to:
<http://www.focusing.org/crossingsfolio2014>

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We could say that the inception of Focusing began in 1953 when a philosophy major, Eugene T. Gendlin, walked into the waiting room at the Counseling Center at the University of Chicago and signed out some academic papers that the staff members were writing on the Center's innovative and quite controversial approach which they called 'non-directive psychotherapy.' As he read, he began to see how his philosophical research regarding the way people symbolize their experience could *cross* with the evolving theories of these psychologists and provide them with a new, more elegant and effective way of talking about and practicing psychotherapy. The ongoing collaboration between Gendlin and the Center's director, Carl Rogers, involved innumerable crossings and re-crossings which resulted in a revolution about how people think about psychotherapy—and philosophy. Eventually, Gendlin, continuing his *deeper look into the phenomenon of crossings*, developed yet more revolutionary practices such as Thinking at the Edge and the Process Model.

For years Gendlin urged us to experiment with combining Focusing with other formal practices—as well as with everyday activities—in order to deepen the understanding of our experiences. Those who followed his advice often reported on the amazing ability of Focusing to integrate with many different philosophical, spiritual, educational, therapeutic, and aesthetic movements, opening unexpected and fresh perspectives. Workshops at the International and FOT Conferences, posts on the Discussion List, the teaching of *crossing steps* in TAE, and even earlier articles in *The Folio* revealed the diverse applications of these combinations.

This year, in response to our invitation to the community for suggestions about a possible theme for the 2014 Folio, many respondents wrote that they were interested in learning more about the familiar Focusing term: *crossing*. Some were interested in hearing about out-of-the-ordinary *crossings* and a few wanted to know more about the phenomenological experiences of the people involved in *crossing* Focusing with...

- What motivated them to initiate the crossing? Personal curiosity? A sense of something missing in the other activity? A wanting to stretch the boundaries of Focusing? A pressing intellectual, emotional, physical, professional need?
- What was the felt sense before, during and after the crossing experiment?
- Which parts of Focusing seemed to blend easily? Or with difficulty?
- Which parts didn't seem to cross at all? How did they experience these successes and failures? What new things did they learn about Focusing? What was the felt sense about those discoveries?
- How did they go about putting these crossings into practice? Into the Focusing community? Into other communities? (health care, business, the arts, education —the list is endless...) How did they experience their public presentation? Positively because

their ideas were enthusiastically accepted? Negatively because they were misunderstood, misinterpreted, ignored? What was the felt sense of *all that...?*

- Did people in...(innumerable fields) want to learn more about Focusing? Did their journals discuss Focusing and...? Did the Focusers write for their journals or speak at their conferences? Why or why not?
- Could they describe any new insights gained about the phenomenon of integrating two unique activities?

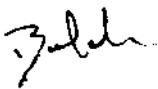
We, ourselves, were intrigued by these questions, and so we put out a Call for Proposals asking potential authors to self-reflect on their own process in order for our readers to more clearly understand the underlying dynamics of ‘*crossings*’—and also—to more clearly understand those qualities of Focusing that allow the Focusing-process to be combined and integrated with other practices.

Hence, this issue provides our readers with some amazing explorations about the *deeper look* into what these authors discovered about the effects of their successful *crossings* in terms of the impact on their personal development. We think you will find their interior journeys and creative adventures inspirational, touching, delightful, moving, and often amusing—and we hope you will become emboldened to launch your very own *crossings* of Focusing with one of your own particular passions.

As the saying goes, “The rest is history”...so many in our community have *crossed* Focusing with such a myriad of topics, and the more we read, the more possibilities there seem to be...So, it is with great pleasure that we now offer you this Folio on, ***Focusing And...Crossings and Integrations.***

And, *cross* our hearts, we hope you enjoy reading the following articles as much as we did!

With regards from your Editors,



Bala Jaison, Ph.D.



Paula Nowick, Ed. D.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As we've often said—and thought with an inner smile—writing the Acknowledgment page always feels good to us, as we are reminded of all of the help and support we've received in producing the *Folio*.

In 2009, Paula Nowick came up with idea of asking for Guest Editors to support and help with the first round edits of our writers—what a brilliant idea!—and we've been utilizing that process ever since.

So, in the Guest Editing department we have a number of people that we'd like to thank, for helping and supporting our writers—and consequently us—with this particular Folio. Our heartfelt thanks to: Gordon Adam, John Amodeo, Debbie Belne, Ken Benau, Stormy Brandenberger, Jenny Cutshall, Frans Depestele, Barbara Dickinson, Katarina Halm, Josiah Hincks, Ruth Hirsch, Larry Hurst, Jim Iberg, Jocelyn Kahn, Susan Lennox, Miriam M, Elizabeth Morana, Herbert Schroeder, Anna Willman. We really are deeply grateful for your help and support—and so are your writers!

Cover Art: We are particularly delighted to acknowledge the person who provided the cover art for us, for this issue. Her name is Shay Nowick—and yes, she is Paula's daughter! We had a vision of what we wanted this cover to look like (in terms of 'crossing') and Paula said, "My daughter can do that!"—and so she did. We asked Shay if there was anything she wanted to say here and she told us just to say, "I am proud to be able to contribute to her (Paula's) work." And we are proud that you did. Thank you Shay.

Layout and Design: We're running out of adjectives to describe the brilliance of Carolyn Kasper, with whom we've been working for a LONG TIME. The '*best of it*' and the '*worst of it*' are exactly the same: She finds every little dot, every missed space, every comma, every punctuation error, and every single bit-that-we've missed (of course thinking that we've sent her perfectly 'clean' articles), and for her kindness and PATIENCE. We are ever grateful, and still in awe of her capabilities after all these years. Thank you, Carolyn!

Webmaster: Once again, we thank our Webmaster, Bill Silverman, not only for his support, but for his patience with those of us (ah hem...!) who are considerably less 'techy' than he is and don't really understand the process of getting our efforts on-line, but there it is, thanks to you. We are grateful.

The Focusing Institute: Finally, our ongoing gratitude to TFI for your ongoing support in producing the Folio. To Melinda Darer, our deep gratitude for your help and patience with all our last minute questions and bits of minutia, and to Elizabeth Cantor and Rita Kirsch for your support and answering the many emails that go back and forth.

Enjoy!

PART 1

CROSSINGS IN PERSONAL LIFE



BIOSPIRITUAL FOCUSING: A Gift to the Whole Body

Nada Lou

In the communist country where I was born, religion of any kind was forbidden. In my adopted country, Canada, my interest was to discover the truth beyond organized religion: that is, I wanted to find out what Jesus actually said. I wanted to search the original source as closely as possible in order to discover what was added through the centuries. This search motivated me to study Christian theology at Loyola University in Montreal. While studying at the university, I searched through historic and academic documents to better understand who was Jesus of history and who was Jesus of faith.

As part of my studies and personal interests, I joined a group practicing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola at a local Spiritual Centre. Ignatian Exercises are based on the writings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order (1491-1556.) The Exercises consist of prayers, meditations, readings and a certain order of rules to follow. A Spiritual Director serves as a listener and guide in this process. When I started to do the Ignatian Exercises, I began to practice applying some of the academic concepts I was learning to my way of living.

While involved in these activities, I happened to discover a small book, *Focusing*, by Eugene Gendlin, on the bookshelf at the Centre. What I read in that book deeply resonated with the Exercises that I was doing. Ignatius recommends that people experience their reading and prayers with "all the senses." That is, to literally see, hear, smell, touch, and taste the goodness of God in their contemplations. Ignatius' thinking, vision and temperament were always very attractive to me in the sense of his life direction as "contemplative in action." Having a Spiritual Director, Lisbeth, who listened to what came through my prayers, was a real bonus to me in many ways. Lisbeth also knew BioSpiritual Focusing and offered me my first taste of Focusing. After being listened to in a Focusing way, I got hooked on it for life.

Soon after, I discovered BioSpiritual Focusing workshops given by Fathers Ed McMahon and Peter Campbell. Originally trained in the spiritual tradition of the Jesuits, Campbell and McMahon explored the link between Focusing and Spirituality. They created the Institute for BioSpiritual Research and attracted a large following to their way of Focusing as a spiritual practice.

In their research they came to the conclusion that being able to experience meaning through the bodily felt sense is the bridge into Jesus' original message and "larger body" that some of us call God. My search for deeper faith had received another nod! I began to follow and videotape their workshops around North America. These experiences launched me into developing my new hobby—videotaping, editing, and producing their message.

A quote from the BioSpiritual Focusing webpage still resonates for me: “It is the human body which provides our most grounded spiritual link, both to the details of daily living as well as the mystery of an evolving universe. Paradoxically, our body, which we so identify with mortality and decay, is itself our conscious bridge into immortality! It is our precious “link” to the universe as a whole...and beyond!”

In my own story, the first thing I discovered in BioSpiritual Focusing was a totally different approach to prayer, Focusing alone. As a part of Ignatian exercises and prayer, in my imagination I would sit on the log by the ocean—my favorite place to be—“talking to Jesus” as if he were my listener. It felt as though whenever I would ask Jesus a question, he would respond, “And what do YOU think”? Gradually I realized that what “I” think has value—enough value to be heard without judgment. That realization changed my prayer of “petition” into prayer of personal discovery. It began also to be a change of thinking about God only from the neck up. The felt sense in my body became the bridge into the bigger Body—the source of all life and all love.

When I hold whatever “issue” I might have, just as it is—as bad as it might seem to be—I acknowledge the truth of myself. When I am willing to hold it gently just as it is, and let it breathe on its own, something comes that changes *it*. During this time of being with my truth as it is, as I feel it in my body, not fixing it, nor running away from it or shutting it off, I am creating a “Space for Grace.” To me, this term, originated by McMahon and Campbell, means that I am holding the issue with a benevolent attitude and being in an actively passive relationship with it. By doing this, I am inviting and allowing something to come in this space that brings a new information and energy. When this happens, I know I did not bring the change by something that I have done. Further, the change has an element of surprise in it; my physical felt sense shifts, which also brings me the experience of the change as being a gift. Gendlin’s terms for this kind of process are “holding and letting.” Gendlin says that both of these must be present for shifts to occur.

As I developed this practice of integrating the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and BioSpiritual Focusing, I noticed that something significant happens. First, I become aware of a sense that I am somehow not alone in the process. I start feeling a change in how my body carries the issue. Then I notice something that seems like it was *always there*, but was not on my radar before. Initially this *something* is not clear, and yet I find myself in a different relationship with *something more* far-reaching than me. What comes is new information and new energy. In spiritual language, information is referred to as revelation, and new energy is called Grace. What this means is that what comes to me in Focusing is something that I didn't make up or invent—it simply comes to me as if it were always there but unnoticed. The information surprises me and also makes the next step clear.

Recognizing that the *shift is a gift* is a significant contribution to the understanding of the Focusing process that McMahon and Campbell illuminated in BioSpiritual Focusing.

Felt sensing experiencing in Bio-Spiritual Focusing carries an additional implication. For those who have an interest in and awareness of a spiritual dimension in life, the felt sense is experienced as a bridge, connection, catalyst or “...” to a Higher Power. Once connected, there is an awareness of a sense of being a living cell that is a part of a larger existence: I

become both a part of and participant in the living process. McMahon and Campbell explain this is what is meant by "The Body of Christ" in Christian theology.

I began to teach BioSpirituality to others.

McMahon and Campbell used to say Gendlin this and Gendlin that...with great admiration for "the great man." Finally I said to myself, "...let me go to the horse's mouth." What I discovered, of course, was both a lot more and different.

I came to understand that Gendlin's theory of Focusing has led to many different approaches of bringing Focusing into people's lives. BioSpiritual Focusing is an example of one of these approaches. Research done by McMahon and Campbell has taken a direction that has fully incorporated Gendlin's practice of Focusing, and has gone a step further to illuminate and include the spirituality of the body. This concept is in contrast to many religious practices in which the body has not only been excluded, but has been condemned as a source of evil.

First videotaping and then editing, learning, teaching and co-teaching, and collaborating with Gendlin, I discovered that my "crossing" with BioSpirituality happened even before I found Gendlin's book and the Focusing Institute community.

As a result of my own crossing I am able to describe some specific highlights that I see as additional refinements of Focusing by the BioSpirituality approach:

POTENTIAL FOR GLOBAL SPIRITUALITY

Although McMahon and Campbell's terminology comes from their Catholic background, it quickly becomes possible to recognize that the ability to bodily (felt sensingly) connect to a God beyond all names does not require a specific religious affiliation. Felt sensing provides "body" to "BODY" connections from which life forward direction comes as a gift. In other words, through this practice, we are able to connect the personal "body" to the larger Divine BODY. The use of the word "global" indicates that this practice is applicable to all religions. One thing we all have in common is the body. Experiencing one's own human body in a felt sensing way provides the common ground for a global spirituality.

CARING FEELING PRESENCE AND THE FOCUSING ATTITUDE

McMahon and Campbell developed a very specific way of attending to what is "between me and feeling all O.K."—that quality of attending which is often referred to in Focusing as the *Focusing Attitude*. Their signature name for this *attitude* is "Caring Feeling Presence." Experiencing in a bodily way how it would be to attend to an abandoned baby or a hurt animal, and conveying an unspoken felt message to it that its life is valuable and important—is at the core of employing Caring Feeling Presence. Learning to hold this kind of caring message makes it possible for this attitude to be applied to one's own abandoned and hurt issues.

DWELLING AND THE ART OF WAITING

Being patient in not-yet-shifted (answered) situations is often challenging even for those who know Focusing but intellectually want the answer “NOW”. Gendlin calls this difficult waiting aspect of the process “holding and letting.” He counsels that a shift “comes” in its own time and quality. It can not be demanded or forced in any way. This attitude of “holding and letting” receives special significance in BioSpiritual Focusing because the shift is seen as a gift, and thus it cannot be manipulated. Understanding that the magnitude and timing of this gifting includes an attitude of caring benevolence, underlines the loving relationship between the “giver” and receiver.

RECEIVING THE GIFT

The last step in a Focusing process has been enriched in BioSpiritual Focusing. It consists of 3 movements:

- The first is reviewing the process’s path. Looking back at the step-by-step movement often brings more insight into what has already come.
- Second is taking the time to receive the shift—the gift—in a quiet, meditative way. It is essential to recognize that such gifts affect one’s whole life, self-identity and self-perception. Such gifts change us and also affect our next steps in life.
- Third is taking some time to thank our own body for what we received and to be grateful for its being the receptor that gives us the sense of being part and participant of creation.

One of the newest movements coming from BioSpirituality is realization that once we *know how* to be in touch with the felt sense, we can connect with it at any moment in time. “Noticing and Nurturing” is a *habit* that requires our awareness—so that paying inner attention becomes a way of life—rather than another thing ‘to do’. This *habit* ‘crosses’ with other Focusing orientations in what we often refer to as the PAUSE.

My personal and specific crossings are also supported through the many different video tapes and DVD’s that I’ve made portraying Gendlin, and McMahan & Campbell—in addition to over 20 DVD’s of various Focusing teachers around the world, who have profoundly contributed to the richness of what I know about crossings. These productions are not only DVD’s—they represent my special creative felt sensing of crossing Focusing with so many other methods.

You may learn more about Bio-Spiritual Focusing at www.biospiritual.org

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BECOMING OK WITH THE NOT-YET-OK

Living a Focusing Life in the Midst of Community Conflict

Mary Elaine Kiener, R.N., Ph.D.

Authenticity requires...bringing oneself before how one already is, how one is being-here...[disclosing] how we are thrown into the situations in which we find ourselves (into which we have lived ourselves) (Gendlin, 1978).

Since first encountering Gendlin's work nearly a decade ago, I have pondered a number of questions. For example,

- Is Focusing something I “do” only periodically or can it provide a model of how I might “be” in my life?
- How can I integrate Focusing skills into the daily unfolding of my life?
- How might my experience of everyday life shift as I am able to be with others in a Focusing way?

As the sages caution: *Be careful about what you invite into your life. You never know what you will be living into.*

In the Spring, 2012, I found myself “thrown into” an unprecedented conflict among a growing local business, its residential neighbors and city government. My regular Focusing Partnership practice certainly helped me navigate the personal anxiety about the situation into which I had lived myself. However, I increasingly found myself “already with” an implicitly understood new way of being-in the situation as it would play itself out over the next 18 months. Over time, others also began to notice (although not fully understand) how important the ability to bring myself into the unfolding “being-here” would become.

My goal in sharing the unfolding of my story is not about presenting historical facts, figures and details. These elements (while instructional and fascinating in their own right) lie beyond the scope of this article. Nor do I offer a well-defined, polished model for conflict resolution. Rather, I invite you to experience the shared bits and pieces of the unfolding story (with its interweavings of felt-sensing process). Perhaps you will be able to notice relevant patterns and crossings that can apply to your own life journey.

WHAT WAS...

I own a beautiful century-old house in a downtown residential neighborhood, with many houses between 100-150 years old. I have lived here now for over 20 years, the longest period of time I've ever spent in a single house. My late husband, Alex, and I spent our

married life together here. We had such a special bond with the house that we honored it with a name that also included our initials: “ASK ME House”.

In 2006, a high-tech start-up company purchased a former neighborhood elementary school building situated right behind my house. Initially, neighbors welcomed the company’s plan to use the school building as a “research and development laboratory”. After all, they were “rescuing” a then-vacant school property. They also promised new, well-paying jobs in a growing industry to our community, which had been struggling with the loss of more traditional manufacturing jobs.

...NOT OK...

In late winter of 2012, I began to notice wooden surveyor stakes surrounding the grassy field on a section of the former school’s property. Once the school’s baseball field, this welcome bit of green space had often served as a neighborhood gathering place for play-time with dogs and children as well as pick-up ball games.

I requested information from both the company and the City Planning Department and eventually learned that the company planned to construct (in their words) “a simple building—a shed, actually.” Initially, I felt a something-sad inside about the anticipated loss of green space on our block, while other parts criticized the sadness as sentimental and selfish.

Shortly after, as construction started, I became intrigued watching the deep foundations of concrete begin offering support to towering ribs of steel. Until one day, my sense of fascinated wonderment quickly shifted to disbelief. Reality set in: “Oh my God, that building is really HUGE!”

A few weeks later, I watched, aghast, as bright blue and white steel walls rolled up to become the sides of the now 14,000 square foot, industrial-looking building. Within a few days, I read in a local newspaper that the company was planning a celebratory dedication of their new “research facility.” They also wanted an extended tax abatement from City Council.

BEING WITH “ALL THAT”

One morning, I had a visual sense that my own spacious 3-story house had been swallowed up by the “pole-barn” (as we had started to call it). I also sensed something inside (that felt like my late husband’s voice) repeating its never-ending litany: “It’s YOUR fault we bought this house. It’s YOUR fault the house is losing its value. It’s YOUR fault. It’s YOUR fault.”

Not only did I have a gut-wrenching *ugh* about the building’s appearance, I felt sad about the changes in our neighborhood’s look and feel. I was angry the company could receive a tax break by jeopardizing the property values of our homes. I also had all these warring factions inside: “I feel helpless. It’s my fault. I’m to blame. What am I going to do? Is there ANY way to fix this? It’s hopeless.” All of that was churning inside, threatening my very wellbeing.

The new building's negative impact on our neighborhood had also begun to sink into the neighborhood's collective consciousness. One neighbor's house (situated barely 12 feet from the building's 140-foot-long north wall) became totally shaded from the sun. Other neighbors faced intense glare as sunlight bounced off the building's new metal roof. Passers-by began to resonate their own powerful visceral *ugh* (especially when seeing the building for the first time).

When a neighbor reached out to a local alternative weekly newspaper, I was invited to share my story with the reporter as we sat together on my front porch, barely 100 feet from the blue and white pole-barn. I felt a shift inside with a realization that "something" was calling me to step forward. And, I was there "alone", since a number of neighbors had left town for the 4th of July holiday week.

My newly-found resolve translated into presenting comments at that evening's City Council meeting (in spite of the shakiness permeating my whole being). The shaky feeling (and the trembling in my voice as I offered my prepared remarks) was not because I was afraid of speaking in public. After all, I teach, perform and sing in public. It wasn't a "simple" case of stage fright. Rather, I began to understand, it had more to do with holding the "*ugh*, it's my fault, what did I do wrong" aspects of my experience along with my disbelief and anger.

I was surprised by City Council members' lack of knowledge of the size and scope of the building project—even though they had been invited by the company to attend a grand reception at the new building site being held only two days later. Just as there had been no notification to neighbors about the site plan review, neither had City Council been notified as part of the process. Their puzzled looks of dismay lent a brief respite *inside* from my background feeling of shame-filled *ugh*...

WHAT WOULD/COULD BE "OK"?

Our concerns now public, I convened a small group of neighbors on my front porch. We began by going around the circle, allowing each to speak about how the pole-barn situation was affecting them personally. Then, as a group, we arrived rather quickly and smoothly at a general consensus surrounding two broad-stroke goals:

1. **Fix the façade.** All of us clearly wanted to make the pole-barn literally "disappear"—yet we realistically knew it was not likely to be torn down. We didn't have specifics yet about what could be OK, but our budding clarity about what was NOT OK began to set the stage for suggesting a broad range of alternative solutions. We were, however, unanimous in our determination to postpone approval of the company's tax abatement request pending a successful resolution of our concerns with the façade.
2. **Fix the ordinance.** We also sought assurance that this type of situation could never happen again. We believed no other neighborhood should have to undergo what we were experiencing.

A few days following our first neighborhood gathering, a company representative joined us for a second meeting at my home. During that meeting, participants restated their concerns. We offered both preliminary ideas for alternative facades and our willingness to work together for a positive solution. In return, the company representative offered an apologetic statement of “We never thought it would cause a problem”, along with a list of all the good things they were doing for our community.

It quickly became clear that the company and its neighbors held completely different views of what the “problem” even was, let alone what could eventually become OK. This impasse would result in multiple failed attempts to engage the company in any kind of meaningful conversation. We had found ourselves in the midst of an unprecedented situation in the absence of scripted solutions. Our “adaptive challenge” (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009) was to find a way to gain a new façade while also constructively dealing with our anger, frustration, fears and concerns related to the addition of a pole-barn in our midst.

DISCOVERING PATTERNS AND CROSSINGS

While I struggled to better understand the company’s continuing lack of response to our ongoing concerns, I also became an easy target for various members of the press to approach me for comments. I began to emerge as the public face (and voice) of the neighborhood’s concerns, partly due to becoming the most consistent attendee from the neighborhood at City Council and Committee meetings related to the “pole-barn” issue.

I had earlier learned from Gendlin how metaphor can provide a helpful means of *being-with* a situation in its murky ongoingness. I would soon discover that metaphor is also useful for creating media-friendly sound bites and shared understandings in moving the situation forward.

In this instance, this company was still youthful in terms of corporate age. Its founder—while entrepreneurial in nature—had come from an academic science background. The company’s minimal level of corporate business experience was well acknowledged, although often overlooked by politicians and corporate development folks because of the potential to bring jobs and economic prosperity to the region.

At one point, I found myself reminded of a typical parental conversation with an adolescent who is yet to acknowledge the extent or responsibility of their recent behavior. For example:

P: How could you do such a thing?

C: Nobody told me it was wrong...

P: That doesn’t always mean it’s “right.”

C: I never thought that there would be a problem...

P: You’re right—You never thought...!

C: Gee, I’m sorry...

P: Being sorry isn’t enough. How are you going to fix it?

The metaphor itself would also continue to expand in both scope and meaning throughout the duration of this experience. For instance, there came a time when the company was finally beginning to explore potential solutions. By then, City Council members had joined neighbors in voicing concerns about a lack of accountability measures to assure that the company would actually carry out any eventual, agreed-upon façade changes.

The expanded metaphoric pattern now had the company playing the role of the handsome, charismatic high school senior football jock. At this point, we (neighbors) were feeling somewhat like the young man's girlfriend in the back seat of his car. As he's trying to romance her, he's also saying, "Sweetheart, you KNOW I love you, and...of course...I'll respect you in the morning!"

Much to my surprise, I soon discovered additional benefits to the use of the "corporate adolescent" metaphor to describe the company's behavior. It added a much-needed dose of humor to an understandably stressful situation and also helped me identify a source of inner compassion that would then become a turning point in my *living-forward* of the situation. I began to envision and share a long-term scenario of a successful grown-up, a successful company in right relationship with its surrounding community.

While never quite envisioning the neighbors (or the City) as having a parental role, I did begin to view the whole situation as somewhat similar to the concept of "it takes a village to raise a child." In this case, I began to think that, perhaps it might take an entire community to help a company "grow up." Within such a scenario, this current situation could eventually be viewed, discussed (and even chuckled about) as within any loving family that has survived the challenges brought on by adolescence.

BEING WITH "IT" FRESHLY

As weeks turned into months, my original sense of...*ugh*...offered a benchmark against which to measure the potential success of proposed solutions. For example, during a trip to Italy in early fall a few months into the situation, I experienced a serendipitous sense of...*ahh*...in stark contrast to the...*ugh*...back home.

I had arrived in Florence the evening before, travelling alone before meeting up with a tour group. Tentatively making my way by foot through town, I turned left at a corner and suddenly beheld the magnificently beautiful Duomo (the fourth largest Cathedral in the world). Although still a few blocks ahead of me, its massive structure dominated the surroundings. "*Ahh*...what a luscious contrast to the pole-barn back home", I thought, while also wondering what it might be to live next to something so visually appealing.

Standing on the street corner, I grabbed my camera. Just as I snapped the first photo, I heard a gasp of...*ahh*...that resonated perfectly with my own just a moment before; except this time it came from a pair of young Japanese women who had just turned the corner in front of me to unexpectedly encounter the same wondrous sight.

Back home again, about a month later in the process, the company offered a landscape architectural plan to a trio of neighbors (myself and two others) with whom they had eventually agreed to meet.

At (my) first glance, the plan was brilliantly conceived. It would use landscaping to draw the viewer's eye away from the building and partially shield the building from view. I remember thinking, "Wow, here's a unique way to help the building disappear."

However, when invited to offer a response, I lacked words to describe my overall sense of the plan. I had begun to develop a deep respect for the landscape architect and was beguiled by his conception of using nature to help the building "disappear." A part of me longed for a workable solution, while another did not trust the company to implement the plan as presented. I sensed a vague, unnamed inner unease with the plan's overall viability. I also sensed that many neighbors would not be accepting of the plan.

I sat, agape and speechless, pausing to find words to express some of all I was experiencing. One of my neighbors blurted out, "Just say it, Mary. You don't need to be polite!" The second neighbor quickly added, "Oh, I know just what you're trying to say..." as she then offered her own (negative) reaction to the plan. I stopped to re-group and ground myself enough to keep from reacting to their emotional comments. I was then able to calmly request a moment to allow my own response to emerge.

In that moment, I noticed yet another layer of "fresh" experiencing, within the context of the overall situation. It's one thing to feel one's own self-in-presence within the safe container of a Focusing partnership. It's quite another to sustain it while communicating with others, especially when they are not already conversant with a *Focusing attitude*. Yet, by being "present" and trusting the "pause", I was able to momentarily continue in dialogue with the company representatives while my frustrated neighbors simply vanished from the room.

In a Focusing session several months later, I unexpectedly sat with an experience that seemed to resonate and solidify a bit of what I had learned that day. The session had started with noticing an almost echo-like pattern of spaciousness and quiet, even as all my life and its circumstances swirled around me. As I sat in the chair, it felt like "a whole new world" in the room around me—or OUT here, on the outside of me. Through the open window, I noticed the quiet in the wind, even amidst some blustery wind outside. And, noticed a whole new world inside me, that seemed to hold gratitude.

And then, I noticed a new "something" in the area of my throat that felt tense. On the outside, coming up the back of my neck and (somewhere between the roof of my mouth and top of my throat) a sort of forward overhang that felt "external". And, there was something on the inside that seemed less clear.

An image came—like a plastic pitcher with a plastic lid, with the handle part in my back and its pouring part by my mouth. Something was keeping the lid clamped. There seemed to be something inside that wanted to be poured out, yet it seemed as though there was a tension between *it* and the clamped top. I could feel that tension in the back of my throat. It didn't seem as though what was IN the pitcher was actually pushing, nor was it

causing the tension. Instead, it felt as if the bottom container part of the pitcher and its lid were somehow stuck—and it was their stuckness that was causing the tension.

As my attention was drawn from the pouring-out-part to the back part of the hinged area, a phrase came: “it all hinges upon...” From back there in the hinged area, where the feeling of tension was, something was saying: “Describe me. See me for who and how I am.” As the session came to a close, I then also heard: “Whatever comes out in speech and behavior, hinges upon a listening and understanding of what’s here freshly in the moment.”

“BEING” BECOMES THE TEACHER

Over time, I gradually began to discern a sort of helpful, rhythmic way of being-in the situation. It involved a gentle, continuing awareness of both my own fresh experiencing of the whole situation and my ongoing process. As a result, I was able to continually shift between the current sense of “this is what is not yet ok” and “this is what might possibly become ok”.

In addition to regularly-scheduled Focusing partnership sessions, frequent walks with one of my neighbors offered almost daily opportunities for being-with all-of-it freshly in an even more direct manner. Although not an experienced Focuser, my neighbor was able to be a caring witness and listener to my process. Over the months, she would become a strong (and trusted) sounding-board and supportive cheerleader, even during inevitable times of disagreement and conflict.

My neighbor’s preferred way of being-in the world is strikingly different than mine. As a self-described “elderly-lesbian-activist”, she would often use “naive, polite and nice” in describing me, and my approach, to the ongoing conflict. Over the months, we would frequently find ourselves exploring the sometimes risky borders and edges of our friendship.

Several months into the process, we had been discussing a tangential issue, not directly related to the neighborhood conflict. At one point, she made a statement that I knew to be factually incorrect. When I pointed out her error, she complained, “You always do that. You always have to be right.”

While something in me wanted to justify my behavior as a simple desire for accurate reporting, another part inside cautioned, “Don’t argue. Don’t defend. Just let it be.” We continued walking in silence for quite a distance, until turning a corner closer to home. As I continued walking forward, she suddenly stopped. From a few feet behind me, I heard her softly say, “You know, I’m jealous. I realize now that I’m jealous of what you have been able to achieve.”

Taking in her words, I felt pleased that she was validating the minor successes we were beginning to experience at that point of the community conflict. Yet, I felt most moved that she had allowed herself to recognize and give voice to her own fresh experiencing. And, that she had felt safe enough to say it out loud to me.

Over time, my neighbor would continue to have similar sorts of insights as we intuitively began to insert quiet moments, as needed, into our walking sessions. She came to

trust that she had my support and acceptance to be however she needed to be. And though she would frequently tell me, “You are being too damn polite” or “You’re being too...” I was able to hear it in a less critical way, knowing that I also had her permission to be how I needed to be.

While my neighbor and I occasionally discuss my Focusing work, I’ve never done anything to formally teach her how to Focus. Yet, as seen above, our walks frequently resulted in shining moments of serendipitous learnings for us both. A few months later, we would experience an even deeper moment of shared learning—one that would test the strength of our friendship.

LETTING AND ALLOWING

It was a Monday afternoon in early spring, 2013. There had been months of tense, stalemated silence between the company and its neighbors. After previously putting their tax abatement request on hold, the company had recently decided to bypass the neighbors in hopes that the City Council would grant their request in spite of the continuing conflict. That evening, the City Council was scheduled to hold a Public Hearing concerning the company’s tax abatement request.

The day before (on Sunday), I offered a last-ditch, olive-branch-like opportunity by sending an email to the company to see if we might re-open negotiations. By mid-morning on Monday, the company founder/president walked around the corner from his office and was seated in my dining room.

Initially, we spent an hour in deep listening to each of our concerns. For the first time in months, I was beginning to feel hopeful—that perhaps we both felt heard and might begin to find a way forward. It felt as though we were two professional colleagues sitting together, drafting something that we could take with us, later that evening, to jointly present at the start of the public hearing.

On the face of it, the joint statement was fairly non-specific. It laid out the fact that we were at least talking to each other again. It also included the company’s written agreement (for the first time!) to put forward a minimum amount of dollars to “fix” the façade.

We both knew the document was more symbolic than substantive or legally binding. Yet, as we sat together carefully choosing our language, I also knew that I was beginning to step into a new, separate role that felt a bit like walking the plank or venturing out onto a fragile tree limb. The initial draft’s final “if...then...” bullet point was to include my future agreement (in my role as a neighbor—but not as neighborhood spokesperson) to subsequently speak in support of their tax abatement request.

I had agreed to type up the statement and then walk it back around to his office for our joint signatures. On my way, I chose to stop at my neighbor’s house to share the morning’s unfolding developments. Her initial reaction was “You traitor! Are you for us or against us? What’s happening with you? You’ve been our champion and suddenly you’re giving in to the enemy.”

I knew it was my turn to listen as I offered her a safe space and opportunity to speak about what was happening inside of her. After reflecting what I'd heard, I then shared what had come inside me as I had listened. We continued to share back and forth this way for quite some time, reflecting not only what was *inside* each of us, but also *inside the space* we shared together. We gently invited what was not ok—and what would be needed—so that it might be ok.

We both distinctly remember a period of about five minutes, during that nearly hour-long conversation, when each of us wondered whether we would be able to emerge from the interaction as friends. Yet, we were eventually able to realize that all we needed was to eliminate the last statement from the agreement. We both recognized that even though I wasn't giving in, it would feel to the rest of the neighbors as though I was. We could live with everything else.

A few moments later, sitting in the company's conference room with the top three management people, I was able to speak from my heart, "I included all the statements except for that last thing. I realize I couldn't do it, partly because my neighbors aren't ready to hear it. I live in this neighborhood. You may work here and own the company in this neighborhood, but I live here." To which they simply responded, "Oh, yeah, we can appreciate that," as we each proceeded to sign the amended statement.

Later that evening, at the end of the Public Hearing at the City Council meeting, I was approached by one of the city's economic development people. Although we had spent months at opposite sides of the table, we had never really been formally introduced, or had any substantive conversations. However, that evening's meeting had marked a major turning point in the process. It was the economic development staff who would ultimately become our champions in eventually finding a tenable solution.

WHEN LIVING FORWARD MEANS STEPPING AWAY

As a Focuser, I'm well aware of how *life-forward energy* often moves us ahead in unpredictable ways. Over the months of this process, I began to notice a continued shifting of how I was within the overall situation.

On one level, I had begun to shed the sense of personal shame that had initially propelled me into action. As it began to fade, it was replaced by a sense of feeling trapped. I wanted to be away from the situation and felt drained by the efforts to continually fight a battle that felt increasingly un-winnable. I still loved my house, but had lost the joy of living here. At the same time, I did not want to leave my house or my neighbors.

However, I also knew I would be unable to stay in the house and remain uninvolved in searching for a solution. I felt a longing to escape, partly as a form of respite from being swallowed-up-in-the-soup of it all. I also wanted to gain some distance and perspective, in order to find a way out.

One day, during a Focusing session, I sensed a dizzy, swirly feeling inside. It seemed to have the energetic feel of a caterpillar dissolving into chyme in the midst of transforming

into a butterfly. I noticed my left hand, gently stroking the area over my heart as if to say, “All will be well...there’s no rush...” while sitting with *all that* which was in the midst of change. And yet, sensing something else inside me that was at once both peaceful and also “not-quite-settled”...Sensing something along the back wall of my throat, as it searched for a word to explain what it IS, not what it’s NOT...It seemed NOT connected to my voice...rather more connected to a movement that felt stiff and not quite ready...I felt a kind of pattern inside...in which there’s a *NOT something*, which then opens up into a *something* and back again to a *NOT something*. As if there’s the “not quite ready”, followed by an invitation for what the “not quite ready” IS...Also, sensing a little bit of “auditioning” about “is it something that WILL be ready?” Finally, as the session concluded, accepting that something is BECOMING and I’m content to let it be THAT for now...as long and as much as it needs.

In another Focusing session, I envisioned what seemed like a very tired bird on a perch, as if observing a cat fight. I had been sitting with a ball of tight, hurting disappointment in my left temple, while recalling recent instances of mud-slinging, blaming and shaming that had been occurring around me. While none of it involved me directly, it was related to and impacting the overall neighborhood situation. I could sense that others’ behavior came from their own places of being wounded. I was also beginning to sense that I could choose which path I wished to walk...without needing to tell others what path they should be walking, for it wasn’t mine to say...while also knowing that people might not always understand...and might even think poorly of me...Remembering a time when I couldn’t handle thinking I would somehow not measure up to their expectations...while feeling more certain that being true to myself and my choices was more important.

The day following my pivotal meeting with the company president, I began my Focusing session with a feeling of nausea on the left side of the base of my throat...and a sense of wanting to cry—not from sadness, but from the nausea...With that, an image came of me, standing in a deep river of muck. I was unsure whether it was different muck or fresh muck or the same muck, or whether muck had ever been there before. I DID know that it was now muck and had a differentness about it...for I had chosen to stand in it because of the decisions I had made the day before...And yet, it had been a stepping-into that still felt like it had been the right thing for me to do...with a knowing that the nausea was coming from having to smell the muck and that I would have to stand here in it for awhile...I heard, “I think I can bear to stand here—just don’t make me eat it or inhale it. Just don’t make me have to take it in.” I was also looking for a way to “rise above the muck”...As the session came to an end, I noticed a quick flash of an image on the inside of my left eyelid, like a snapshot of half of a face...All I could catch—it was female, sort of smiling—an approval kind of smile!

STOPPING OR QUITTING...OR PASSING THE BATON

By late spring, 2013, I had spent more than 12 months engrossed in the ongoing saga. We had won a number of significant victories. We had gained unlikely allies from all sectors of the community and had established friendships with more of our nearest neighbors. The

ordinance change had been accomplished and the economic development folks continued to negotiate the façade-fix on our behalf.

One weekend morning, I awakened with a sense of, “This big thing is coming to an end...working its way to an end.” Knowing also there were still a few things for me to do, in order to “Finish what you started.” Yet, also something about setting down, letting go, and walking away from...ways of being that no longer serve me.

The day came when we were presented with a proposed solution that was less-than-perfect-but-better-than what-currently-is. I was exhausted and hoarse from a nagging cough. I yearned to not have to talk about the issue anymore.

Dipping inside, I sensed something that felt like NOTHING...alongside that huge part that really wanted to stop my involvement in the issue and to have the issue stop. And something in between the issue stopping and the energy of my involvement (or engagement)...something about “fuzzy new boundaries” about the level, type and scope of my engagement with this particular situation and/or other situations...Sensing the place that had felt like nothing, becoming more like a dark space I couldn’t see into yet...and then something just wanting to hide, to be alone...wanting to just withdraw...”Ah, maybe that’s what the dark space is for...” to use as a source of shelter, where I can just hang out a little bit”...And now, a shifting to a sense of relief and enrichment...It’s not just about not knowing what it is or what’s next...But right now, there’s a sense of relief in imagining that dark place as a place of refuge...before new problems come.

I had taken the pole-barn process as far as I could. I was feeling invited to other, new endeavors where I could apply my newly-tested skills and capacity for being-in challenging situations.

In the days and weeks that followed, I still felt myself an active, involved neighbor with a continuing vision of a vibrant, collaborative, caring community. I was simply no longer leading the charge.

Some neighbors chose to interpret my “stopping” as “quitting” as two of them stepped forward to continue pressing for a more acceptable façade-fix solution. I then began to realize perhaps I had merely “passed the baton” in what had now become a neighborhood relay.

LIVING A FOCUSING LIFE

A fresh smile comes inside, with a paraphrase of Gendlin’s response to a question posed by an audience member during my first time at the Focusing Institute Summer School (FISS): *The goal of Focusing is not about having NO problems. It’s about an ability to experience NEW problems.*

As I look back freshly over the past 18 months, I discover that I have indeed learned a great deal about what it means to live a Focusing life. On an embodied level, I can more easily hold onto that which is wanted, without squelching all the not-wanting. I can invite the not-wanting to help inform the way forward, rather than blocking it or hijacking the process.

And, I can discern when it is time to set down that which no longer serves me, while also letting-and-allowing those around me to be who they are and as they need to be.

Or, in an adaptation of a prayer by Swami Vivekananda:

When I asked God for...[community] He gave me...[a pole-barn]...God gave me nothing I wanted. He gave me everything I needed.

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THE NATURE AND EXPERIENCE OF A HEARTFELT CROSSING

Kevin McEvenue

WHOLEBODY FOCUSING CROSSING WITH THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

I want to share something with you that I found very exciting when I was invited to update this piece on the Crossing that happened between the Alexander technique and Wholebody Focusing that occurred many years ago in a little book entitled, “*Dancing the Path of the Mystic, Awakening of Embodied Consciousness and One Man’s Journey into Becoming a Whole Person*,” (2002). I defined a Mystic as one who yearns to live more deeply from his or her spiritual center; one who is open to the Spirit in all aspects of life.

How has this practice evolved over the last ten years?

DIFFERENT WAYS OF CROSSING EXPLORED

I want to say something about how this kind of Crossing is very different from other forms of Crossing of Disciplines that we are more familiar with. I think of a Crossing as being associated with building a house, for example, where the many disciplines come together with a plan to build something that fits the expectations of a design. Another example is a Crossing to engage in different kinds of sports and teambuilding that develop skills training, teaching us how to function together in very skillful ways or maybe sharing ideas together, thinking along with each other on a subject of mutual interest.

The Crossing that I want to share with you is a very different kind of Crossing—with very different expectations and outcomes. This kind of Crossing is not predictable; it comes totally as a surprise, totally unexpected, totally new—with a never-before quality and could not possibly have happened unless we were open to sharing and listening to each other in this way we call *Focusing*.

THE EVOLUTION OF HEARTFELT CROSSING—AN UPDATE

Looking back, this Crossing began as I began to work in two disciplines, Focusing and the Alexander Technique. As the Crossing began to find a way to integrate, gradually over time, it emerged into the Wholebody Focusing modality that today stands on its own, adds something more, and yet contains all the essential elements of its original foundations. And it keeps evolving and keeps taking on a life of its own.

The results of such a Crossing have been amazing, for me and for others. The process has evolved naturally out of the Wholebody Listening Partnerships toward what felt matched, open, and often mutual in heartfelt relationships. We call this *Heartfelt Connection*.

The pivotal question was always, “What am I doing that is interfering with the natural functioning of myself?” At the same time what seemed to be implied further, in the Focusing modality, was an invitation, “Can we make space for what gets in the way—for that too—with an equal positive regard?”

CROSSING BEGINS WITH A PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT —A PERSONAL STORY

This question about making space was also a very personal question that came out of a fundamental need in me, a need for connection with another life, another person that felt meaningful to me—and hopefully with a feeling that was mutual for the other person. There was something I also felt was missing...something that I kept looking for and could not find...that kind of heartfelt connection with another human being that would satisfy a basic need to feel alive, find myself, to feel a sense of place, that I belong, that I have a right to be here, and that I am not alone. That search for *something more* came together in a Crossing between the essential elements in Alexander and Focusing, and ultimately emerged into what we now call *Wholebody Focusing*.

The foundation of *Wholebody Focusing* entails being in *Grounded Presence*. All else will follow naturally from what has come before. As an Alexander teacher, I was concerned with changing dysfunctional patterns of behaviour that were so embodied that they have become unconscious, and I was concerned about how to change that.

F.M Alexander observed that the body comes alive as a whole, an awakening of an “action potential” in order for change to happen in any one part. Focusing attends to the *felt sense in the body* of what is *there* and *yet unclear*, meaning that the *thing that gets in the way*, will find its way, such as dysfunctional patterns, will find its own way back *to a right way of being*.

Wholebody Focusing includes the sense of the alive-body awakened by its sense of grounding and support, usually starting from the feet upwards and connecting to the whole of its environment. We discovered that if we become well-grounded and present to that quality of the *alive body* in its own *embodied wisdom*, the rest will take care of itself!

Growing up, I wanted to be an architect, but everything seemed to get in the way of fulfilling my desire. My father wanted me to be a priest, or a life insurance salesman, and an athlete like himself. There was no space for a *Me*. That *Me* seemed to be undermined at every turn. However, unbeknownst to me, some very special skills were developing quietly, silently unnoticed in a life full of frustration, feeling alone, and unappreciated.

Looking back over my life, I can see that this kind of frustration of blocked-growth was also exactly what was needed to develop the skills that I needed to move my own life forward, as it was meant to be. I was driven by an insatiable need for connection, especially

with another person one-on-one. It was as though I needed to feel that kind of connection to find myself, a sense of how to be me, and then how to be with others. Without that sense of connection, I felt ungrounded—I didn't know who I was or how to relate to others. I needed this sense of grounding to open up to *me*. It was like a driving force, a kind of activation out of the very thing of the not-right feeling! The suffering of it all...

These kinds of Crossings are perhaps as present to my consciousness today as when they first happened, many years ago. This is *Heartfelt Connection* that crosses with another as the very quality of connection I have been looking for all my life, and now I have it. These crossing experiences were already there; they happened unexpectedly. They were amazing and I didn't know why or what they meant. *Focusing* gave me the framework I needed to name and to own this experience and to know how to use it and share it with others.

CROSSING IN ACTION—EXAMPLES OF A HEARTFELT CONNECTION

I want to offer you two examples of how these kinds of Crossings worked—even before I knew how to use them!

The first example was an intention to share the Alexander technique in a trade with another person's discipline of Shiatsu. As I recall, we seemed to be on solid ground, comfortable with one another. It was not a first time for us and so we seemed to be willing to be open to what was there between us as we worked together. And then something remarkable happened, totally unexpectedly. And although she was working with me in Shiatsu, my body awakened to itself in a whole new experience of the Alexander Technique, as I had known it. It was like a whole paradigm shift, a dream I never thought possible—and it felt *so right*. My whole body was coming alive, with an inner directed wisdom from the inside not from the outside as I would have expected. It felt so alive; the self-activation was total, moving naturally and effortlessly with an intelligence and meaning all its own.

The transformation felt complete—my life would never be the same. My attitude towards working with others shifted. It became *inner-directed* rather than outer-directed—and with a new and very real sense of humility.

The second example seemed to follow from the first. I wanted to share a similar experience with a fellow colleague. The invitation brought an immediate resistance, an issue around control.

She said, "I can't, I don't want to!"

I listened to her, and took her seriously. I respected her need for control, the fear of letting go, and what that meant for her.

She said, "I can't let go, there would be nothing there!"

I made space (in me) for not knowing what to do here, without trying to fix it in any way, but I could certainly feel the anxiety between us. I *stayed with*...then suddenly *something* opened. I felt flooded with information about how to *be* and what to do around this very specific situation between control and letting go without any loss of self. Now I

know that there is another way to maintain control. The feeling was like a paradigm shift, moving beyond a belief system that seemed stuck—pointing to the presence of an inner intelligence—a wisdom that lies at the heart of us offering to move us through a limiting belief or stuck place to new possibilities...allowing change to happen.

THE BENEFITS OF CROSSING. WHAT DID WE LEARN? SPECIFIC QUALITIES WE CAN NAME.

In the above examples we were both willing to share something with one another in this kind of open-hearted way. The first example gave me an experience of the body coming alive to itself, the instinctive body, the body of evolution, independent of me. I would describe this bodily quality as “*spontaneous inner-directed movements that seem to have a life all their own.*”

The second example illustrates the Wholebody Focusing modality at work. Two colleagues were willing to be open to a shared experience, inviting some kind of movement in a stuck place with a Focusing attitude. The very apparent conflict that came up between us was just what I needed to explore the power of this *Inner Directed Wisdom* in action, namely a way to move beyond a limiting belief towards a *Larger Sense of Self* opening up a whole new world of possibilities...beyond what we think we know. Once again this knowing could not have come to consciousness unless we were willing to meet each other in this shared experience of Crossing. As Teilhard de Chardin has said, “*A person grows as a person in connection with another person and in no other way.*”

HOW THE LARGER WORLD OF LEARNING CAN SUPPORT OUR INNER EXPERIENCE.

I would like to put the above experiences in a larger context—the way I learn best. First, I need to have my own inner experience—then I want to have my experience reflected and supported by another, whose experiences are somewhat similar. For over a century of experimentation, Quantum Physics has pointed to a very significant observation that has fascinated me. Namely, that when a neutral kind of human consciousness is present it causes a random and disordered fluctuation of electrons to reorganize themselves in meaningful and non-random ways. This meaningful reorganization is something that occurs in human consciousness, and gives rise to a certain quality of Presence.

In the very same way, the quality of my observer Wholebody Presence facilitates a reorganization process at a bodily level which touches all layers and levels of the human being, from the sub-molecular to the firing of cellular tissue processes which impact physical, psychological, and energetic function. When I allow myself to touch the world and be touched by it, my experience of self is enlivened and expanded. (Whalen & McEvenue, 2009, p. 6.)

The discoveries of Quantum Physics point to the importance of our evolving human consciousness and shows that our consciousness can change that which is random and

unchangeable—if we are able to be conscious with a sense of *neutral*—connecting to the ground of the wisdom’s own environment working through a person. Then something can awaken in a more orderly and perhaps meaningful way. This is the power of Consciousness connecting to the power of a *Larger Wisdom*.

A HEARTFELT CROSSING—GROUNDED PRESENCE, THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS APPLIED

Here is the next step in a Crossing (that, of course, keeps evolving), emerging out of the qualities of *Heartfelt Listening*—the *Wholebody Focusing Listening Modality*. The essential quality is about connecting with *Grounded Presence*: Me Here, separate from you—and yet wanting to make space for the *sense of You*—and what is alive in you—and—it is the kind of Crossing seems to come as a surprise—not of our own making, and yet just right. We make room for both, because *Grounded Presence* opens to a Larger Sense of Self—the nature that makes Crossing that is so satisfying for each of us. A “Me” naturally opens up to a sense of “We” in *Heartfelt Connection* and Communication.

The Power of Heartfelt Connection in Action

The following illustrates the potential power of *Heartfelt Connection* in between two colleagues skilled in *Wholebody Focusing*. Something critical had happened just before we began. My colleague, Barb, appeared to be in some kind of shock. She mentioned that she had a reoccurring meniscus (musculoskeletal condition) that had suddenly flared up again. Her right leg, without warning, locked tight and she couldn’t straighten it out. When this happens, her leg freezes, and she can’t stand or walk on it for months at a time.

This seemed like a wonderful opportunity to explore our skills of *Wholebody Focusing* and *heart-to-heart listening* to see what *it* might want to tell us...what *it* needs...and remarkably the situation was resolved in one session!

We started with grounding and connecting to the *Larger Self* between us, *felt sense-to-felt sense listening*. We didn’t go to the issue of her locked right leg first. Instead we looked for a *safe place* where Barb could be more comfortable i.e., to a place where part of her was functioning normally—so she could find something that she could hold on to. We invited the knee pain to be there just the way it was, the way it needed to be, and made room for both, the part that felt alive and grounded and the part that wanted our attention just the way it was, and holding both with equal positive regard.

Together, I helped Barb to *hold both*...the felt sense of the *whole body*, alive in its consciousness, next to the *part* that seem to be in shock. We invited the *in-shock place* (with locked knee)—to feel the life support of the OK place (holding the felt sense of both) so that *something* could awaken between them, in their own right time and wisdom. *Holding both with equal positive regard* is one of the essential qualities of this modality.

Something started to move, first in the part that felt normal, and then gradually some subtle movements began to appear in the part that was feeling the shock. At first we didn’t

know what was happening, but it was clear that something had awakened, as though the various parts were beginning to reorganize themselves and we just gave them space to do so. Out of the blue, as it became more aware of itself, the shocked knee asked, “*What’s happening?*” At the same time, the shocked part seemed to be flooded with information, images, memories, words, and physical shifting as it began to unwind itself. We just stayed, in attention, with the *not-knowing*—holding the space and just making room for what seemed to be wanted. Our attention and presence was vital to what wanted to unfold.

Suddenly something came in me (*The Listener*). I could feel a something new awakening...a something fresh happening...and it seemed to be awakening in Barb, too (*The Focuser*), and so I offered this possibility to her to see if she was ready to receive it.

She recognized that something was trying to unwind and/or perhaps even straighten out, but there was also some resistance to letting go. And then something told Barb, “*It doesn’t want Barb to throw herself off the cliff.*” That message made total sense to her: This knee was trying to hold her back to keep her safe. It was as though this injured part was there to protect her, and *it* needed to be seen and heard in its role here. With this new awareness she was able to acknowledge and appreciate why this whole situation was happening. *It* did what it did to keep her safe from harm!

With this appreciation and acceptance from Barb, the body movements heated up even more intensely, as though the body as a whole just wanted to shake itself free and rebuild itself in a whole new way. Very specific movements began to come in her right foot, creeping up the leg, right into the knee itself. The whole leg seemed to want to straighten, but it didn’t know how to—yet. The moving, the reorganizing, seemed to be looking for a ‘how’ but needed time and space to rethink itself.

Many steps follow, one after the other, too many to describe here. Suddenly, out of the blue, something truly remarkable happened. First the knee and leg were flooded with a warm loved feeling. Then Barb was filled with a self-doubt that was familiar—like a kick-back reaction for feeling so much joy. She made room for both. Suddenly the knee unlocked itself, the leg straightened up and she found herself standing on her own two feet again! The movement continued. It didn’t stop there. It was as though the entire right side of her body wanted to find its rightful place—the whole of itself—once again, as though *it knew* how it was meant to be. Barb felt a return to that spontaneous child she always was, now with adult consciousness.

This session, lasting just over an hour, opened up many doors, connecting with many threads in her life and needs, allowing fresh patterns to emerge, some connecting to risk-taking, but to other issues as well.

We knew this would take time. But the chronic condition has not returned these past three years—just the warnings—when she is beginning to jump off that edge again. The warnings have become her companions. The reorganizing itself, the shaking up of the whole body seemed to affect the basic molecular structure itself, re-patterning itself into a whole new way of functioning—a way that she could have never thought possible before. And yet it brought back the embodied experience of a spontaneous child she always was—and still is!

UPDATE OF A CROSSING; AN EVOLUTION TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN—HOW IT BEGAN

So where do I want to take this story? What do I want to mark to update where it all began?

It started simply with just me, a young man that was curious and very needy, looking for something and not knowing what he was looking for. And yet he was driven to keep looking, keep searching, knowing that something wasn't right inside, but he didn't know what that was.

Fortunately my unhappy fellow came face-to-face with a series of crises that seemed to change my life. I had been diagnosed with a degenerating disc condition that I took to be a life sentence. Life was over. I felt so depressed and yet there was so much anger there too! "*I am not going to take this!*" There was a kind of determination that I didn't know I had. I knew that I had to find my own answers in order to cure myself.

Shortly thereafter, the Alexander technique presented itself; it was an important step, but didn't completely satisfy—I felt there must be *something more*... Then something unexpected happened. I discovered something new and totally physically and emotionally transforming. In the course of working with one of my clients, she unexpectedly said, "You must meet Gene Gendlin; you seem to be speaking the same language."

I attended a workshop on *Focusing* where I'd had a pivotal moment that changed my life—once again. "*This is what I have been looking for. Now I know what that is!*" Everything shifted and yet it was the same. It was like I knew something, but I didn't know what it was that I knew—and then I suddenly did—It was *always there*. *Focusing* felt like a whole new language. The sense of it was all-inclusive, containing all that had come before, and yet so much more that was still unknown. I was being introduced to the *Focusing attitude!*

At some point I realized something *different* was happening here; I didn't have a word for it yet—"The Crossing Function"—but it was taking on a life of its own—Bigger than Me, and I knew it. The new shape was *Wholebody Focusing*, and a new piece called *Grounded Presence* in the *Focusing Attitude*.

THE LARGER SELF IS THE ALIVE BODY CONSCIOUSNESS IN GROUNDED PRESENCE!

That shift was pivotal once again, connecting to the earth, to nature, in a simple way. It awakened a Presence to what I can only describe as the body alive to itself. My body was able to come alive to itself and connect with the whole of me with a sense of its own wholeness and wisdom. It was all there, I could feel it, I could observe it moving through me, independent of me, but it took some time to name it.

Now I realize it was the sense of the *Larger Self*, something in Me and More than Me. The body alive as the *Larger Self!* I felt I was part of something, a kind of Presence, a larger presence that was wise, intelligent, and there for me. I felt loved—a quiet loving that

not only made room for me, but space in me to be able to make room for others to be just the way they are too.

This sense of the *Larger Self* seemed to awaken a bodily aliveness that seems connected to our bodily evolution, connected to our instinctive body, and to so much more. It is within this *Larger Self* that human consciousness is able to find a way to connect with this instinctive body and to work together.

I want to say that the instinctive body, the consciousness of evolution, working together with human consciousness *IS* the consciousness of the *Larger Self* inside us. I am only just beginning to realize the resourcefulness that this *Larger Self* makes available to us when we can turn to it. This is the edge of what excites me now: the bodily aliveness, as experienced inside, as a consciousness all its own. This, the presence of the *Larger Self* that is me and so much more than me when I invite it to function along with me.

I call this *Participatory Spirituality*, which is yet a new form of this ever-evolving *Heartfelt Crossing* that began so many years ago.

A SIMPLE EXAMPLE OF THE LARGER SELF IN EVERY DAY LIVING

I would like to give you a very simple example of this *Larger Self* in an everyday situation that happened just recently.

It was early morning; I like to sit first thing and reflect on the day and perhaps what came during the night, a kind of meditative moment. I was deep in concentration when suddenly I heard the garbage truck approaching. My body reacted in panic. “*I forgot to put out the garbage. It’s garbage day!*” My body got all uptight as I moved awkwardly in a kind of blind, all-arms-and-legs-akimbo, not knowing what to do next.

But then a friendly voice appeared inside me that said; “Kevin, you’ve got lots of time.” In spite of the panic, I heard that voice, and I knew it was speaking truth. The panic state relaxed and I began to become more aware that, in fact, the garbage truck was at the top of the street, and it would be some time before it got to my door. I had lots of time. I breathed. I felt spacious. I took my time and, with a light heart, I put out the garbage in plenty of time for the pickup.

This was the *Presence of the Larger Self*, aware of the larger picture. It had been there all the time, wanting to remind me of its sense of it. For a moment I had forgotten until I was able to hear the gentle voice that just wanted to keep me informed in what was actually happening.

How easy it is get distracted and lost in fear and panic, and to forget the presence of the *Larger Self*. How easy it is to forget that the Larger Presence is always there. But this time I laughed, and I felt it was a very good example of how my little self can take over, panicking as usual, and then how sometimes the *Larger Self* reminds me of the bigger picture, as it did here. The *Larger Self* holds the larger picture, but too often I get triggered and try to function without it!

SOME CONCLUSIONS IN THE BIGGER PICTURE

As I come full circle, I realize this story of Crossing awakens my evolution, my own history of struggle and where I am now. At the beginning, the question inside of me kept asking, “*What am I doing that is interfering with the natural functioning of myself?*”

Now the answer seems self-evident. I see the changes in everyday situations. Today, I seem to be more in sync with myself and what is out there. I’m not responding as defensively as I used to. There is a kind of pacing in my life that I love now. Life feels more comfortable to me. Finally I have come to the conclusion that maybe, “*Life is easier than I think it is!*” The sense of self is becoming more me, not less! This is the Power of Crossing that has taken on a life of its own, and this is what is happening as it continues to update itself and promises more...

Acknowledgement: My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Karen Whalen, with whom I have worked for many years, and from whom I have learned many things—together—in *Heartfelt Communication and Conversation* over many sessions of listening, recording, and describing what has been shared together.

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IS “THE DEATH OF THE EGO” COMPATIBLE WITH FOCUSING?

An Integral Perspective

Stefan Beyer

MY OWN TRAVELOGUE

My journey began when I was about twenty. I read many books and tried many approaches, both psychological and spiritual, that promised a better life. In the end my favorites—those that worked best for me—were Carl Rogers’ person-centered approach and Focusing, some types of meditation, and certain bodywork techniques, especially Feldenkrais. It did not take long for me to understand Focusing, but in my explorations of meditation practices it took quite a long time before I understood ‘real meditation’, which for me is the realization of spiritual non-duality.

After having lived with both Focusing and at least glimpses of non-duality for many years now, I can ask myself what it would be like if I had not known, or did not know, one of the two approaches. In either case it would feel like something very important was missing. If I had only Focusing I would lack the global solution of non-duality as a frame for my experiences. It is comparable to walking on a long board which is twenty inches broad—it makes a huge difference whether that board bridges a canyon or is put on level ground. Having only Focusing without non-duality is like moving across the abyss. In the context of feeling that I am in a way ‘already saved’, Focusing assumes a more playful note. Spiritual ‘Self-remembering’ certainly did not nullify the effects of Focusing, it rather gave those effects more space—it ‘liberated’ them further.

Conversely, I can also ask myself, what it might be like if I had only the non-dual insight without Focusing and Gendlin’s philosophy. My answer would be that the phenomenal world that I would thereby embrace would be comparatively ‘rigid’ and ‘flat’. The transcended world would not fit as well to the unconditionality and openness brought about by the transcending. It would be like the existence of musicality without knowing how to sing or play an instrument.

The above relates, however, to being influenced by ‘living with both approaches’, which means practicing them at different times. I also experimented with doing Focusing and remembering non-duality simultaneously, but I found that to be difficult. A problem seemed to be that Focusing in the usual understanding addresses the person and the body. Even if we take the body in an advanced understanding as an “environmental interaction” (Gendlin), this idea of interaction is still different from the spiritual non-dual. My current preference for an ‘unforced’ simultaneous combination is therefore to address the non-dual Self instead. I will present suggestions for this at the end of this article.

FOCUSING AND NON-DUAL SPIRITUALITY ON ONE MAP

If I were to ask myself the “Thinking at the Edge” question “What do I know about Focusing that (most) other Focusers do not know?” the answer would be, “It should be complemented with true non-dual spirituality”. I call it “true non-dual spirituality” in order to distinguish what I mean from other common understandings of spirituality and non-duality.

I can best explain the difference by referring to Ken Wilber’s “Integral Theory”, especially to an early version of his developmental theory (Wilber, 1984, 1985 & 1987). I am using Wilber’s terms as a rough frame for what I want to say, perhaps not in accordance with him in every detail.

The Centauric and Subtle Realms

In an early publication Wilber relates Focusing explicitly to the level (“realms”) of “the centaur” (Wilber, 1984, p.162); later he called that level “vision logic”. A core issue on this level is the unity of mind and body, hence the name centaur. (A centaur is a mythological being with the lower body of a horse and the upper body of a human.) Humanistic Psychology belongs to this level, as do all psychologies and philosophies which are based on intentionality and meaning. It is the highest level of personal development, and its non-duality is of the kind “everything is connected with everything else”. Being is seen as a “being-in-the-world”. Of course the centauric realms include a variety of different approaches, and I would say that Focusing and Gendlin’s philosophy are the most advanced of these.

However, beyond this personal centauric level there is still a whole “tier”—the transpersonal, which contains three levels: the subtle, the causal, and the ultimate (non-dual). I would say that only the subtle level may still be in direct reach of Focusing, whereas the causal and ultimate levels are not. Let me explain this:

The subtle realms comprise a variety of phenomena, which can be divided into two groups: one group is of experiences in which the self is not experienced as the centaur, but as the so-called “low-subtle self”. Examples of this are out-of-body-experiences and paranormal phenomena. The other group, related to the “high-subtle-self”, includes archetypical references to an identity which transcends the centauric self in another way. An example of this is the spiritual visualization of deities. These archetypical references can also appear in some types of therapy.

My own very first one-to-one Focusing session provides an example of where an experience of the subtle category might occur within Focusing. It was about 30 years ago, at the Focusing summer school in Germany. I attended a workshop where we beginners were paired up with people from the advanced group for work in pairs. As there were more beginners than advanced participants, I had a session with the workshop leader, Friedhelm Koehne, with Martin Siems sitting in as an observer. At the beginning of the session I felt nervous and tense, so it was suggested that I close my eyes and Focus on how this nervousness felt in my body. After feeling the tension for a short time, I had an image of a sun, which then changed into the fantasy of merging with that sun, so that for the rest of the session I *was* the imagined sun. I remember thinking that this experience was not exactly Focusing as

described in Gendlin’s book, and therefore apologized: “This is probably not Focusing, but it feels very good.” I was told that it was quite ok to stay with that vision and when I opened my eyes after half an hour of ‘being the sun’, Martin remarked that my eyes were shining.

Whether the sun in a vision is really an experience of the subtle transpersonal, depends, of course, on how it is understood. The sun can also have a special personal meaning, which wasn’t so in my case—questions in that direction “did not fit”. It becomes an example of the subtle transpersonal if it is taken as somehow ‘archetypical’. Sun or light are often used as symbols for Awareness or the Absolute—see for instance Plato’s famous analogy of the cave.

After my session it was suggested that my sun experience might have been a way of “Clearing a Space” by my body. This comment begs the question of how to classify “Clearing a Space”, a Focusing step that typically leads to a feeling of not being burdened by problems, with an imaginary space between the problems and oneself. Space is, of course, another symbol for Awareness. In a way “Clearing a Space” transcends specific situations, and it may give rise to spiritual connotations, such as “a feeling of unity and spirituality”; “a sense of a larger self”; or “a sanctuary” (Klagsbrun, 2008, p.217, 218 & 223). I assume that especially with these connotations, “Clearing a Space” may belong on Wilber’s subtle transpersonal level. However, for me, “Clearing a Space” is clearly not what the spiritual Awareness-teachings speak about. It is still a phenomenon. (By phenomenon, I mean anything that is perceptible, thinkable, feel-able or experience-able in any way as an object.)

Focusing can reach the subtle realms, because the subtle realms are still phenomenal, they can be experienced. Focusing asks for and heeds only things which are *experience-able*.

The Causal Realms and Ultimate Non-duality

The core issue on the next level, however, cannot be experienced as a phenomenon. In the metaphor of Plato’s analogy of the cave, one has to turn 180 degrees in order to look at the sun, instead of at the shadows in the cave. Instead of asking, “What is this felt sense like?” one would have to ask, “What is perceiving this felt sense?” If I look at something, it is not about what I look *at* but what I look *out of*. This approach is called Self-Inquiry. What I find is not a ‘thing’, but *Awareness*.

Usually I think that I am identical to my body-mind, but on taking a closer look I can dis-identify from all phenomena related to my body-mind—from parts of the body, as well as from thoughts and feelings. That from which I cannot dis-identify, and therefore that which I must be identical with, is Awareness. Awareness is not a phenomenon that I can perceive as an object—I can only recognize it by *consciously being it*. As the traditions put it, Awareness is self-luminous: it knows itself from the inside, through self-identity.

This is the causal level of spirituality. The new kind of non-duality which is realized on this level is that of body-mind and environment, as both are equally phenomena. (This non-duality is, however, very different from a theory of interconnectedness.) Yet, there is still a new, subtle duality between ‘pure Awareness here’ and ‘objects of Awareness there’. There is still an element of ‘deception’ or ‘ignorance’, still a subtle ego. That is why there is a further step which leads to ‘true nonduality’.

We Focusers know a similar procedure to the above disidentification from the body-mind. We call it “becoming Self-in-Presence”. For instance, when I find that I am Focusing with a pushing attitude, instead of identifying with this attitude, I can dis-identify from it by saying, “Something in me wants to push” or “There is a wanting to push”. It is said that Self-in-Presence doesn’t have an agenda. Since “Presence” is also a synonym for “Awareness”, one might think that Self-in-Presence is a causal experience. I would, however, disagree. “Self-in-Presence” doesn’t have an “agenda” in the sense of a *content agenda*. It does have a *process agenda*. No one has the idea (and I would not suggest it in the context of Focusing) of dis-identifying from *it* by saying things like, “And then there is the thought of dis-identifying from the pushing”. From the causal perspective, Self-in-Presence is—just like “Clearing a Space”—thoughts and feelings happening in Awareness. Self-in-Presence needs to be created, whereas Awareness is already given. Self-in-Presence is temporary, Awareness is ever-present. This also distinguishes Awareness from deliberate attention. Even if I am not attentive, for instance in day-dreaming, there is Awareness. Otherwise I would not know the content of my daydream, and would not be able to talk about it afterwards.

Awareness is like a guesthouse, and Self-in-Presence is like a temporary host in that guesthouse who cares, for instance, for felt senses as the guests. In a way the host is different from the guests because he or she is more connected to the guesthouse than the guests are. In another way, the host is just another person in the house, like the guests, and very different from the house.

So what can still come beyond the causal level, after the realization of ever-present Awareness? In the next step to true non-duality, one realizes that Awareness, now freed from its identification with a part of the whole (usually the body-mind), is indeed ‘the whole world’ in the sense of everything that is given in each situation.

If I investigate the distance between Awareness and objects of awareness, there turns out to be no distance. The relationship between Awareness and objects is different from that between a coin and my hand, if I have a coin in my hand. We say, “I have it *in* my hand”, but in reality it is only *on* my hand. There is the hand, and then the hand ends, and only then the coin begins. But when I am *aware* of a coin, it is not the case that somewhere there is Awareness and then Awareness ends and the coin begins. The coin is truly *in* Awareness, not separate from it. A traditional metaphor for this relationship is that of an ocean with its waves. The waves are part of the ocean.

Now if I am Awareness, as I have realized on the causal level, and Awareness is one with what I am aware of, it follows that I am all that I am aware of: the tree, the clouds, as well as my body, my thoughts and felt senses. It doesn’t necessarily mean that I am other people in the sense of being able to read their minds, but I am them in the sense of being what appears of them to me. I perceive and know by being the so-called perceived and so-called known. In other words, in this perspective there is no perceiving and knowing, only being.

This is not only a logical conclusion. The resulting experience is really that of *being everything* which is given. Some descriptive words for me are ‘being distributed all over the place’, all over the individually perceived world. My resulting mood is—which is quite

typical—a sense of freedom and unconditional contentment. To be ‘distributed’ does not feel as crazy as it may sound—rather it can feel as if I am coming out of a craziness and suddenly, for the first time in my life, starting to feel really ‘at home’, ‘at peace’, ‘centered’, ‘clear’ and ‘sane’.

In a way it means a global solution—I realize that not only my own present situation is self-luminous Awareness being what is given, but *all* situations, past, present, and future, of *all* sentient beings.

I need to add that the way I have described non-duality here is rather the Indian Advaita version of it, which speaks of a “true Self” or “Atman”. In the Buddhist version it would tend to be expressed in negative terms, as what it is not or no longer. One would say there is “anatta”, which means no self, no ego, and there remains just “what is”. There are also traditions which call it “God”.

In order to get an impression of the Buddhist version of this identity shift, you might first imagine that you as your body-mind have disappeared—say you have died—but the world would still go on without you. As a second step you might apply this view of the world additionally to your body-mind. Imagine the body-mind is also still there, with all its sensations, thoughts and feelings, even the “I-feeling”, but “it is going on without you” (see Rajneesh, p. 71).

Focusing cannot reach the true non-dual insight, but it can reach, as we have already seen, symbols or expressions of it. It can also reach its effects; it can recognize that the non-dual insight can carry forward. Tony Parsons, a kind of “teacher” of non-duality (he denies being a teacher), bears witness to this effect. In a recent video interview (Parsons, 2013) he talks about the reactions of his listeners. He says that the ego—the apparent separate self—fears its death, but its death is also its greatest yearning. “The separate self—the me—longs for its own absence”. And then he adds, “When this message is presented from nowhere...in the body...(there) is a sudden Aha”. As I understand it, he means that when the message about “the death of the ego” is presented—not by an I, and therefore “from nowhere”—listeners may have this “Aha” reaction.

Previous developments become integrated

“Death of the ego”, which actually means the end of a false identification, may sound ‘anti-personal’, but it is actually a ‘trans-personal’ step. One can perhaps compare it to the step from before the centaur to the centaur level: On the so-called “mental-egoic” level one doesn’t feel oneself as a body-mind-unity, but only as a mind that needs to control the body. One does not feel like a centaur, but like a rider on a horse. On this level it might appear either useless and stupid or dangerous to ask the body about a problem. One might object to Focusing: “But if I rely on the body, does this not mean giving up all control? Will I not become a victim of bodily drives and go insane?” What would you answer?

I would say that if you know Focusing, there can still be conscious control, as before, if necessary. In Focusing conscious control gets a new role by being used for process interventions—not for deciding, but rather for allowing the unfolding of parts which are relevant

for a decision. And in this way, Focusing means ‘more real control’ over one’s life than before.

In a healthy development, Wilber says, the previous levels are in some way kept and integrated within the higher level. Each level is already a so-called “holon”, a whole, and each subsequent level is a new holon which contains the previous one as a part. It is comparable to a molecule, which is a holon of atoms, but can itself become a part of a cell, which is a new holon. The cell can in turn become part of an organ as a new holon, and so on.

In this respect Wilber’s theory is very similar to Gendlin’s developmental theory in “A Process Model” (Gendlin, 1997). According to Gendlin’s model (in extremely abbreviated form), plants evolve into animals, but animals are still somehow plants (tissue process). Animals evolve into humans, but humans are still animals and also plants. Gendlin’s theory can even more clearly express than Wilber’s in what way the previous levels are “kept” and in what way not, and what a “healthy development” would be. Former developmental stages are, of course, the past of the organism. One might say that in the healthy version everything of the past which is relevant for the present is working implicitly, and only that which is relevant. If something of the past dominates the present experience, the person suffers an unhealthy structure-bound experiencing.

Take for example a conversation with another person—if everything of the past were to be cut off, you would not understand anything. You would not even know the meaning of the words the other person is using, since you learned those meanings in the past. Your present understanding is based on having lived in similar situations as he. But you need not remember the past learning situations explicitly—they work implicitly. On the other hand, an example of structure-bound experiencing would be a conversation in which some of his words trigger a memory of a traumatic event that so overwhelms you that you cannot listen anymore. (For a more exact explanation of the relationship between past and present see chapter IV-B in Gendlin, 1997.)

In Wilber’s theory, correspondingly, an unhealthy development might mean that a developmental level tries to dominate other levels. He calls the dominating level an “arrogant holon” (see Wilber, 2002, p.121-123). Lower levels can become arrogant as well as higher ones. So-called “spiritual by-passing”, when the transcendence of the personal is misunderstood or used in an anti-personal way, can be an instance of the arrogance of a higher level.

Since what is relevant of the previous levels is kept, in the transpersonal stages only the *identification* with the body-mind as “what is my ultimate or true identity” is dropped, but *distinctions* between the body-mind and the environment can, of course, be kept. In the context of the non-dual experience, going for a walk to me often feels like “I am walking through myself.” This sentence expresses both the distinction and the unity of the body and the landscape.

I hope it has become clear that “the death of the ego” is not incompatible with Focusing. “The death of the ego” is another way, a very interesting version, of carrying forward. The fact that the source of that carrying forward is not in direct reach of Focusing need not bother us too much. There are many individual developments for which specific approaches

other than Focusing are needed. For instance, for certain changes of movement patterns, bodywork methods such as Feldenkrais are needed. Once such approaches and their effects have been experienced, the experiences can be part of the body’s implying and therefore be taken into account by Focusing.

If Focusers are interested in as many options of carrying forward as possible, or in as complete a carrying forward as possible, I would recommend trying some of the specific approaches to true non-dual spirituality. A lasting plateau-experience of it is not easy to attain and therefore very rare, but glimpses are not that difficult. Two teachers who I think are very clear on the subject are Rupert Spira and Douglas Harding. Douglas Harding has designed some very simple experiential Self-Inquiry “experiments” that work for many people at least as a first step (www.headless.org).

If one prefers to keep the identification with the person, or if one does not understand spiritual non-duality, there are also other options for crossing Focusing with spirituality. You might for instance imagine the Divine as ‘another’, as God, with the additional idea that He or She has a person-centered attitude (in Carl Roger’s sense) and can be your Focusing companion. You can also try to “offer” your current experience to that Divine. Especially if there is suffering, you can give it to God as a present. The idea is that God can bear it easily and will be happy that you thought of Him or Her (see Meera, p.78-80). By the way, I would say, with those practices the non-dual Self is projected outwards.

FOCUSING IN A NEW BROADER CONTEXT

Focusing can support transpersonal realizations

It already follows from my “travelogue” that I would not only recommend non-duality to Focusers, but also Focusing to people who are on the path of non-dual spirituality. “Non-dual” people, however, often have an objection to Focusing and actually to all psychological methods because they think they might only strengthen the ego. They would ask, “Why should one decorate a prison cell if one wants to leave it, or maybe has already left it? Decorating, making yourself comfortable in it, turning it into a golden cage, will only delay one’s escape.” To this I would give the following answers:

First, there are very few people who have a permanent plateau-experience of non-duality—I would estimate less than one in a million. Most people who consider themselves to be on ‘the Path’ are either only interested in the non-dual and maybe understand the message intellectually, but not experientially, or they experience it only temporarily. Taking myself as an example, I would say that I experience non-duality for some minutes now and then. Typically, I have it and then a personal problem arises which draws me back into an identification with the body-mind. Theoretically there would be the option to repeat Self-Inquiry in order to dis-identify again, but this often either doesn’t work or works only for a short time, and it appears as a fight. In the religious literature it is sometimes referred to as a “holy war”.

For me, working on the interrupting problem with Focusing is a much better alternative. I would say Focusing in this context is comparable to a safety net for aerial acrobats in a circus—the net prevents a further fall, and it is also resilient, a bit like a trampoline, so

that the acrobats bounce back into the air. The alternative to doing Focusing is not (as the objection of the non-dual people against Focusing would imply) to remain in the non-dual, but in effect to drop into a deeper and longer lasting identification. Starting from the centaur level, Self-Inquiry can become easier and more effective again.

In a similar vein, Ken Wilber strongly recommends “shadow work” as a part of his “Integral Life Practice” (Wilber, 2008). He emphasizes that shadow work is an original contribution of Western psychology, and that no traditional spiritual path has anything like this to offer.

Progress on the spiritual path in general is also dependent on personal motivation. It is often said that one would get enlightened instantly if one were to wish for it whole-heartedly. In the beginning of the spiritual quest this is, of course, rarely the case. As we have learned from Tony Parsons, “the I” both fears its death and yearns for its own absence. Something in me wants the freedom and contentment of the non-dual, and something in me wants the pleasures of a separate self. The motivation will change with more experiences with both modes. In general, the motivation will change the practice and experience, and the experience will change the motivation. There is (usually) a gradual development, and Focusing could potentially support this in an optimal way—we can, for instance, explore what is implied both in the fear and in the yearning.

The personal relationship to non-duality can also appear in one’s dreams. James Swartz is someone who teaches non-duality in a rather orthodox (Advaita) version, but who is also working, in a less orthodox way, with his dreams—there is a section dedicated to this on his website (www.shiningworld.com). When he dreams, for instance, of a landscape or even of his father, he takes both as symbols of the Self, and the dream as conveying something about his relationship to the Self. Symbols for Awareness include the landscape, the sky, a mountain, the sun, the ocean, a diamond and everything which is more or less eternal and/or above things. This might be useful information in connection with Gendlin’s dream work question #16 (Gendlin, 1986, p. 191), which explores connections to spirituality. Of course the mentioned meanings are only hypothetical; they need to be checked by asking the felt sense of the dreamer.

If all goes well, with a “healthy development”, the insight of enlightenment does not just transcend the existing personal aspects but crosses with them to a ‘new person’ or individual. But this will happen more readily if the personal aspects are already capable of this crossing, as opposed to being structure-bound frozen wholes. A previous practice of Focusing will help this condition to be met. In this sense, non-dual realization complemented with Focusing can be seen as a further development compared to ‘only’ non-duality.

‘Integral Focusing’

When a problem draws me back into identification with the personal, it will be adequate to start from the conventional Focusing perspective. For Wilber “shadow work” also means a re-owning of something that has become marginalized by the person, and therefore a temporary re-identification. However, for people who already know non-duality to some

extent, the traditional formulation of Focusing may indeed feel restricting. In the conventional formulation, Focusing addresses the person as if the person were the ultimate identity, and in this sense it does strengthen the illusion of the ego.

However, the same is true for everything we do with the idea of being a separate self, even for sitting in meditation. That’s why Zen-Buddhism recommends that one regards meditation not as a path to enlightenment (with the implicit false assumption of being unenlightened), but as an expression of enlightenment (with the assumption of already having it). The Advaita teacher Rupert Spira responds along similar lines to a question about whether physical exercises like yoga and qi gong would not strengthen the identification with the body. He replies that it depends on how we understand those activities. If they “are undertaken as an offering of the body to the open, loving, transparent presence of Awareness in which they appear, or indeed to express, share and celebrate its [meaning Awareness’s] effortless, inherently free nature, they will not strengthen identification.”

Spira’s insight supports the option to do Focusing as an Integral practice—‘Integral Focusing’ if you like—in the way Wilber recommends doing physical exercises. Instead of identifying with the body-mind and then moving the body, you can remember your non-dual identity and then move. Wilber claims synergistic effects for this—not only will the exercise be physically more effective, but also your realization will deepen. The general idea of Wilber’s approach is to let every aspect of our empirical, relative existence help us on our way to enlightenment, and afterwards to let enlightenment express itself in all of those aspects.

The understanding of Focusing as an extension, expression, or ‘descent’ of the non-dual would mean a formulation of Focusing that should absolutely satisfy the non-dual people who have objections to the traditional formulation, which is addressing the centauric self.

A New Vision of Focusing

This is my vision of Focusing in that context: When the Self, which is Awareness being everything that is given, manifests as a problem, it may pray to itself by becoming a Focusing question and may answer itself by becoming a felt sense. It may express its Love by becoming an explication of that felt sense and it may celebrate itself by gratefully receiving it. It will do it like this only if it fits, which now, in this new context, means, if it fits for the Self. Therefore “if it fits” is identical to “if it happens”.

In this vision, the new Focuser is the Self (Awareness) and the new body is the Self. Everything is the Self. If there is a Focusing partner, they, too, are the Self. Therefore consciously abiding as the Self is a new kind of accompanying, which can be called communion. It is the non-dual version of “intimacy”. Out of it “right speech” and “right action” may arise.

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PART 2

CROSSINGS IN PROFESSIONS



TEACHING ARCHITECTURE AS A PROCESS

Ayelet Ben Zvi

During the last 10 years I have been teaching a Design studio course at the Department of Architecture, Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, and at the Design Faculty of the Holon Institute of Technology. In the studio, I teach students how to approach architectural design and plan development. Students are given a task to design a project and I help them develop a concept and an actual concrete plan. Usually I teach first-year students. This specific juncture of their first year and first design project—this “spot” between their life experience so far and their entry to the academic situation—is a perfect place to point out to them the endless possibilities for exploring how to perceive the world as students of architecture.

I would like to write about my experience of using open Focusing sessions in teaching the design studio course. Focusing provides a tool for implicit inquiry that helps with inspired knowledge from multiple sources, including the students’ felt senses, visual memories, physics, literature and more. Focusing can help students achieve a fresh perspective on a variety of topics. Through Focusing we can get a deeper look at the understanding that there is no line between our body and the universe, and that we influence and are influenced by all that is around us. In this way, architecture becomes a process-oriented practice, rather than simply dealing with forms, or with finding solutions for a set of problems. Architects and designers can approach their fields as a way to innovate with endless possibilities through Focusing and working with the implicit.

While preparing my notes for this article I realized that I am looking for a specific point of view. I want to talk about teaching architectural process, but not through describing it abstractly—more through trying to demonstrate the felt sense of this kind of teaching. I was reading a lot of other people’s writing, for example Peter Zumthor’s, “Thinking Architecture”, “The words of Louis I. Khan”, and more. Their words have this special, unique ability to take me to other places—on journeys to many different places. Through that experience, I realized that my way to write would be through the felt sense. I wished to create for the reader a “felt sensation” through their interaction with the words, so that curiosity and the desire for new understanding would occur while reading it.

My wish as a studio instructor is to awaken or to point out the deep memory of the body-environment connection. I’m trying to create a space for the student to observe and explore the endless possibilities of how to perceive their actions and body movements. I invite them to take their time and focus on their daily activities, observing how their body interacts with their surroundings via motion through space, noticing their relationship to the place and what felt sense comes to them from being in the place.

The procedure creates its own sense of presence and slowly the intricate implicit rises up. The students start developing this tool for implicit inquiry that helps with combining inspired knowledge from multiple sources.

The roots of our understanding of the architectural relationship lie in our childhood and our youth—in our innermost memories. Students are learning to work with their personal world biography and felt senses. They learn to listen and observe, giving time to the process.

So, this is how it works at the Academy, where I am now teaching 23 first-year students their first studio for architecture and design.

EXERCISE #1

In order to understand the architectural act, I ask the students to choose any daily activity such as brushing their teeth, taking a shower, drinking coffee, running, smoking, hand clapping and so on. They need to break the actual body movement into many fractions, and so create a sequence of the action with no less than 30 parts (Figures 1–2).

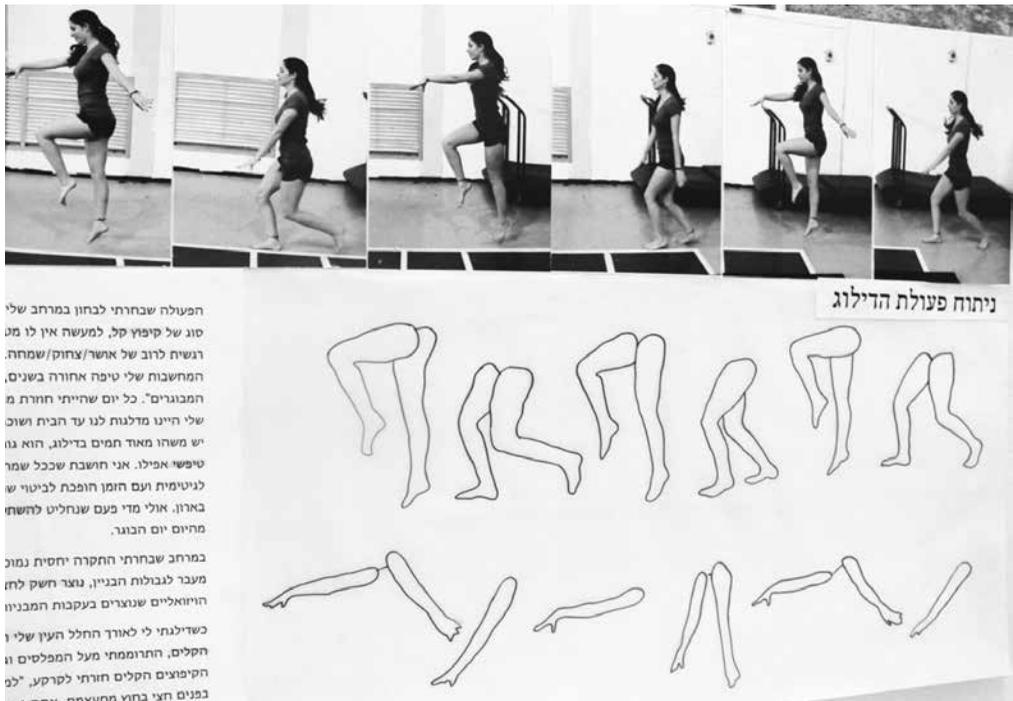


Figure 1. In the first exercise, S. was working on the act of skipping



Figure 2. In the first exercise, M. was analyzing the act of clapping hands

How do we measure a hand clap, or a scream, or an eye blink? My intention is to provide a platform for this action to unfold. Through this exercise, these delicate micro movements become part of the student's awareness of the intricate implicit-explicit-occurring body-environment topography. ("Topography" is a term being used at architecture school. It means the "surface" that represents all the intricate-explicit-occurring. It is the accumulative data that the student will work with.) This creates the possibility for them to have a dialogue or interaction with what is there in their experience and to unfold their implicit awareness of these daily actions.

As Gendlin says, "Living bodies consist of ongoing body-environment interaction". Through Focusing, the students are getting in touch with their experience of their body-environment relationship. Analyzing it, thinking about it, and putting it on paper as images or in a 3D medium is similar to the TAE process, but instead of a sentence we receive a set of images that refine the process of understanding the body-environment relationship for each student.

I ask the students to focus on their movement: "...Be with it, be the movement... Let the movement become topography... Can you sense the interaction with the space?... What is the underlying structure?... Can you sense the occurring?... How is your movement perceived when looking at the movement from outside?"

I love to teach, to remind students of the wealth that exists in our movement in the world. The interaction between people and places creates rich possibilities to sense living. Curiosity and the desire for the not-yet-expressed are most important for any creative profession.

EXERCISE #2

After working with the body movement, the students are given a new task: Look for a site and analyze it. Heidegger says, “The relationship of man to places and through places to spaces is based on his dwelling in them.” Therefore they should pick a specific site that would be a place for them to dwell in or on.

The research on the site should focus on light-shadow, density, rhythm, texture, axis, opening and more. The work on the site is similar to the work on the body. Using their tools of observation and Focusing on the site, I ask them to investigate “What does the place want to be?...What is the rhythm of the site?...What felt sense does the site bring?” If the site is a room, for example, we can focus on what the room was like, what smell was in the air, how the floor felt under the feet or the door handle in the hand. Was there a feeling of narrowness or width, or a feeling of intimacy or vastness?

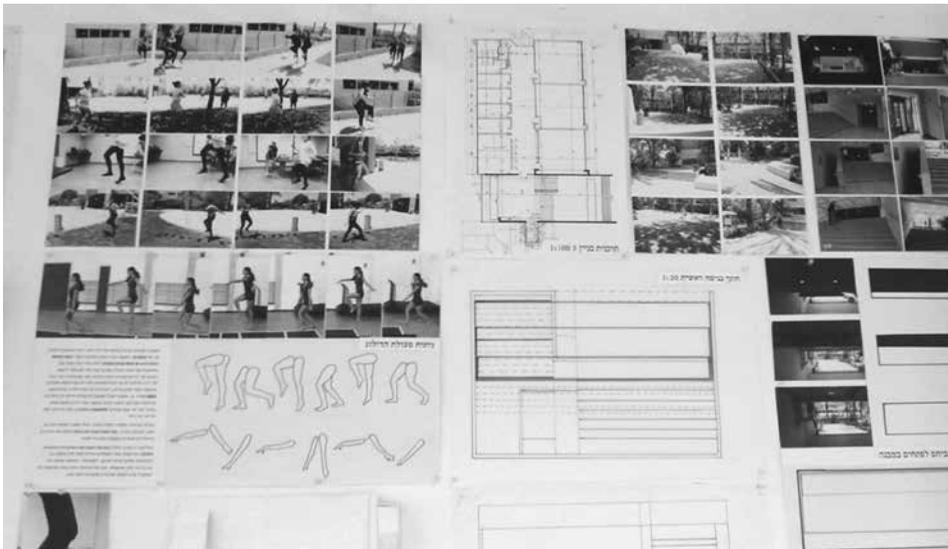


Figure 3. In the second exercise, S. studied a passageway between buildings.

For her site, S. chose a passage between buildings with stairs. There, she can climb up or down. She was working with understanding the movement of opening and closing her eyes, joyfully skipping along while getting through the passageways through the building (Figure 3).

The students are starting to establish the body-environment relationship. We focus on the body movement qualities on one side, and on the other we focus on the qualities of the chosen site. Then I ask them to hold the question, “What is the felt sense of them both

together...How does it feel?" I ask them to pay attention to the situation where body and site meet. There is a certain felt sense to it. By dwelling in the chosen site with their bodies, they create a "new" meaning to it. Now the body-environment is an occurring situation. It is not simply the body and the site interaction as two parts, but more as a "new" environment which is occurring. There is more to it than just the body or just the environment. This is why I ask them to dwell into what is occurring and try to sense the structure which holds it all together. Each student has his or her own unique field, in which I ask them to look for the "new" occurring.

EXERCISE #3

The final stage for the students is to create an architectural program after sensing their body-environment felt sense. The program should represent an architectural layout of the bodily understanding they gained through working with the site and their body movement. In some ways it is similar to Evelyn Pross' steps of TAE (steps 3-5). While working with the crux sentence or the phrase, they hold the phrase and sense the expanded meaning of the site with their body, as one new bodily understanding. This hopefully will bring a new way to design the site after realising how they wish to dwell in it.

S. chose to create a set of ramps, stairs and platforms in order to provide the skipping sensation and movement that she found in the first two exercises (Figure 4). While skipping she was aware of what the eyes can see, how the body would resonate with the actual physical site, and its interaction with the rhythm of skipping. Her ramps and stairs definitely create the skipping sensation that she sensed through Focusing. Her solution to the design task would not have been the same if she had designed the stairs without going through the experience of Focusing and dwelling in the felt sense of skipping. Her work is dynamic and resonates with her skipping study. The "new" place is a result of her study in the previous exercises. There is a new "felt sense" to the place.

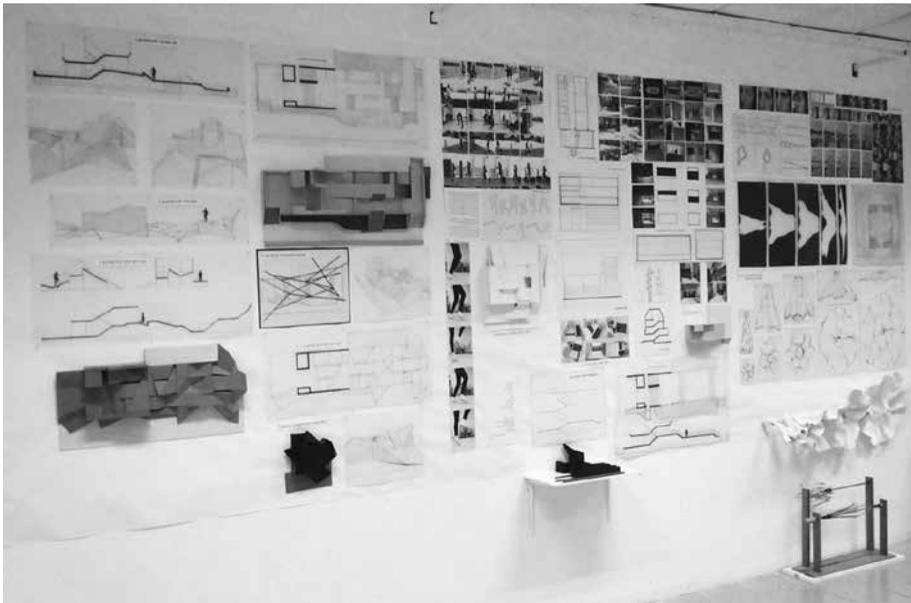


Figure 4. S.'s complete project: On the right, we can see her work on understanding the opening of her eye, then her research on skipping. On the left, there is the architectural synthesis of body movement-skipping and her scheme for ramps and stairs for skipping around the Campos. This is a first-year student's first studio, yet her project is mature and self-explanatory.

After completing their projects, each student presents his or her work in front of an audience of architects, other teachers from the faculty, and other students. After the presentation, there is an open discussion and review of the project by the audience. A central point discussed by the reviewers at the presentation was that our studio deals with pre-body movement. By pre-body movement I mean micro-movement. The ability to separate the movement into a sequence of micro-movements generates an implying which expands the bodily understanding of motion through space.

Through these exercises, the students have realised how deeply one can go while observing the experience of situations and motion in space. The students learn to zigzag between their inner felt sense of the body-environment situation and their work on a concrete site with analysed materials. It is a movement back and forth between intellectual knowledge and the inner grasping of body-environment experience.

The students learn to “say” the place. The “new” design and planning were developed from within. The “new” is *implying into occurring*, it is an ongoing process. There is a deeper connection to the site and to the specific intention to be developed at the site. In Gendlin’s words, this would be the “carrying forward,” which is much more “precise” than an analytical research approach to finding a solution or a certain shape that would fit the site.

The ability to skip between inner body environment and outer environment—the ability to cross between inside and outside, whether it is a physical body or a concrete site, a

small object or a large building—this ability and flexibility help us to create a living, dynamic creative universe. I try to help the students develop this flexibility to sense and observe the different parts and at the same time to feel and observe the whole as one—to be able to skip joyfully in between. My cumulative experience throughout the years and my current felt sense together make me realize that this is the beginning of a new, more structured language for architecture. TAE and Focusing provide tools to organize the intuitive. Working with these tools enables me to teach that architecture can also be architecting.

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COMMUNITY WELLNESS FOCUSING IS CROSSING AND COLLABORATING

Patricia A. Omidian, Ph.D. and Nina Joy Lawrence, M.S.

INTRODUCTION

I sit here with my computer open searching inside myself. What do we mean when we talk about Community Wellness and how might we explain what we do? We know that Focusing is a human process and that it naturally crosses with other activities because we have seen it over and over again in so many settings around the world. We start with knowing what Focusing is for us as part of the world-wide Focusing community. Wikipedia notes that:

[Focusing]...involves holding a kind of open, non-judging attention to an internal knowing which is directly experienced but is not yet in words. Focusing can, among other things, be used to become clear on what one feels or wants, to obtain new insights about one's situation, and to stimulate change or healing of the situation.

Focusing is a life-forward process, which we share with our fellow human beings. As humans, we do not live in isolation, but rather in communities and groups. Whether we connect with others through our family, a village, a peer group at school or a wellness group such as a Twelve-step program, we are all interdependent beings. It is within this interactive space between people that conflicts and friction can arise. Community wellness practices recognize this tension, as well as the shared aspects of such elements as trauma (war or disaster) or just the everyday struggle to support our loved ones. These approaches highlight the value and importance for any individual's well-being within the context of a healthy community, and thus the inclusion of Focusing is a critical element in healing on so many levels—from the personal to the interpersonal.

Focusing can be blended or crossed with anything in life. As I come back into myself, I notice first, a memory of the second workshop on Community Wellness that Nina Joy and I held at Stony Point in April, 2010. We handed out note cards and asked everyone to think of all the ways they could cross Focusing with something else in the world. As we worked together to list things, we came to the realization that what we were all thinking about was of “Something” to which Focusing could be added. In other words, instead of finding people who want to learn Focusing and then creating a Focusing group, it was easier to add Focusing to something a group of people were already doing. Based on this we came up with crossings, such as the following:

- Music and Focusing
- NVC and Focusing
- Twelve-Step and Focusing
- Children and Focusing
- Theater and Focusing
- Aging and Focusing
- The Arts and Focusing
- Resiliency and Focusing
- Gender awareness and Focusing
- Women in transition and Focusing
- Development aid and Focusing
- Management and Focusing

At a workshop in Japan (August 2013), participants worked in groups to come up with ideas for “*something* and Focusing”. We gave out two prizes: one for the longest list and the other for the funniest or most unlikely suggestion. One group was only able to come up with five, but another group listed more than fifty. Everyone thought the funniest, least likely idea was to bring Focusing to ministers of the Japanese government. Their lists included tea groups and Focusing, teachers and Focusing, nature walks and Focusing, Buddhism and Focusing and so on.

Invitation 1: And what can you imagine?...Take a moment and settle yourself into your body. Sense into areas of your work, family or life in general that can use Focusing. Bring this into your body and notice what comes freshly for you...maybe take time to write down what comes. Maybe also take a moment to appreciate your body’s capacity for Focusing.

And when you are done, write down what came.

SHARING FOCUSING THROUGH “BITS”

In this process of combining community wellness and Focusing, Nina Joy and I started by thinking about the “bits” (components, parts or elements) of the Focusing process that we might want to share. Because our community wellness work requires presentations that are immediately trainable and sharable at any level by those who learn it, we came to realize that we were not teaching Focusing in an orderly, progressive manner. What we did find, however, is that there were many aspects of Focusing that could be shared without trying to train people to be “experts” at Focusing. An excellent example of such an adaptation

is William Hernandez's use of the Pause to teach Felt Sense Literacy, which demonstrated that any "bit" of Focusing could lead participants into an inner relationship with themselves and into deeper understanding of the group. Thus in using the Pause as a way to approach Focusing, Hernandez met the need of the group in a simple way, one which supported inner transformation as it facilitated community wellness. Nina Joy and I found a similar process in Afghanistan as we worked with Afghans to meet their immediate needs.

How might we discover some of the "bits" of Focusing?

We start by imagining that Focusing is made up of parts or components or "bits" and each "bit" is like a piece of a child's jigsaw puzzle that has been cut into 6-10 pieces. There are so many elements of Focusing that we learn over the years that it might feel difficult at first to even sort out some. To facilitate that process, we developed **Invitations 2** and **3** that deconstruct Focusing into "bits" and then further deconstruct one of these "bits". Over the years Nina Joy and I have found that we could start sharing Focusing from any of these "bits". This process is one that is open to change, and I have found it does not matter what comes first or last on the list.

Invitation 2: Take a moment and settle yourself into your body. Sense into the broad steps or components of Focusing as it comes freshly in your body...Maybe you want to spend a little time here holding what comes to your awareness...Hold whatever comes as a guide for moving forward...And take a moment to hold some gratitude for what has come...

And when you are done, write down what came.

For example, at a Community Wellness Workshop in Japan, one group came up with the following "bits" of skills:

- Clearing a space
- Reflection
- Listening
- Inviting
- Feeling the felt sense

Now, I invite you to take the time to look at your list of "bits" and sense into each one...to see which one seems to call to you...Maybe one feels right to select for the next step...Take a moment here to bring whatever comes freshly in your body, sensing how it feels there. There is no right or wrong in the choice you make, and you can always select another if you like. If it feels right, start by holding this "bit" as a new jigsaw puzzle for which you will want to find the smaller "bits" it contains. What are these? Sometimes I call these "bits" the skills we need to be able to Focus.

Invitation 3: Take a moment to settle yourself back into your body. Invite in this new piece that has become the new puzzle and hold it freshly in your body... Sense what comes for you as *ITS* parts... As before, this is not all there is to this component, but what comes holds some of what feels important about this... And before you stop, thank your body for what came...

And when you are done, write down what came.

The same group selected *Feeling the felt sense* and listed some of its “bits”:

- Waiting
- Noticing something
- Staying with it
- Feeling a shift

In this following section of looking for “bits”, we want to sense into some of the important attitudes about safety that we develop as we learn to Focus, and especially, attitudes of safety, within Focusing partnerships, that help keep our inner places safe. As you work through the next invitations, you may find that you cannot distinguish between skills and attitudes, but that’s ok.

Invitation 4: Take a moment in your body. This time, sense into the key attitudes that are important in Focusing... Maybe taking some time to hold them freshly, sensing what new meanings they might have... Take time to get a body feeling for each one if it feels right, getting a felt sense of one of these attitudes that you came up with... Maybe bringing one or more of these feelings back into the room with you.

And when you are done, write down what came.

The Japanese group listed the following attitudes:

- Welcoming
- Interested
- Presence
- Being gentle

In the workshop we noticed that any of the attitudes could be matched to any of the skills. When crossing Focusing with something we do in life, we might want to start by sharing a skill, and at other times we might want to begin with a Focusing attitude. Each time Nina Joy and I work with a community we start at the beginning, asking them about

their needs, without assuming that we know the answers. We pair what comes freshly about the bits of Focusing with the attitudes we might want to help them develop. Because each situation is different, each list tends to be different. This is the value of sensing into what comes in a new way.

COMMUNITY WORK

Where do you work? What in your life calls for Focusing? Where might one of the “bits” of skills or attitudes that support the Focusing process be helpful?

It is easy to identify what is wrong; yet, no one wants outsiders (or even friends) to see only those parts of life that are not forward moving. One of the things I have learned is that if I want people to really listen to a health message or a message for change, it is better to start by helping people enhance, increase or even recognize what it is they are *doing right*. I spent the last 20 years developing health and mental health programs for refugees and others in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In order to facilitate these programs, I

1. Does the behavior cause harm to the individual/group, or
2. Does the behavior cause no harm or benefit (or is it neutral) to the individual/group, or
3. Does the behavior have benefit for the individual/group (positive).

Then, I would ignore those actions that are neutral and immediately focus on those behaviors that are positive or have benefit. This orientation on the positive brings the community together, and they feel they have something to contribute that is life-affirming and in which they can take pride. It is uplifting and also reassuring to share these observations among themselves and in front of an outsider.

Moreover, the three questions above can be used as a model to help promote wellness. As trust is built and understanding grows, the community will start to identify those areas of harm that they want to change. Then the impetus comes from within and is not dictated from outside. It has been our experience that when we hone in on what is working or healing in a group, in time, as this wellness is strengthened, other issues will be brought up and included in the healing process.

In Afghanistan I was asked to develop programs for prevention of violence against women. Yet, no man wanted to be confronted by an outsider telling him what he should or should not do in the home. Instead, the program started as a wellness program for village women using a bit of Focusing, with attention on listening skills. We found that by starting with inner healing and strengthening the positive, the men saw their wives, mothers and daughters transform and become less violent themselves as they practiced listening skills. The men asked for help to learn these same skills so that they would not use violence in the home. Through applying a “bit” of Focusing and matching was what wanted in the community, we found violence was reduced. Men and women started by listening to their inner selves, those parts of them that felt wounded and angry. And then they practiced listening to each other. Just the simple act of listening brought huge changes in their lives.

To put it simply, we helped the community ask themselves the following:

- What is the issue that the community wants to solve or heal
- What positive skills do they have
 - What skills do they want to add to this
- What positive attitudes do they have
 - What attitudes do they want to develop

In the beginning of our work with Focusing in Afghanistan in 2001, we were requested by an aid organization to develop a program that would help Afghan aid workers who lived as refugees in Pakistan and were working to bring sorely needed medical, food and development aid in war-ravaged, Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The organization made a decision to assist their staff in dealing with the traumas they had all suffered from the war in Afghanistan, including loss of family, property and livelihoods, from the harrowing flight to safety in Pakistan and their struggles to live in Pakistan as refugees.

Participants of our initial workshops identified what their problems, issues and needs were, such as wanting to know specific ways to deal with trauma and violence in their lives. Many asked for ways to stop being angry. As we worked together, with Nina Joy, leading the way with Focusing, we explored some of the skills this group already had in their tool kit, including examples of positive coping and non-violent communication. It was important to start by honoring the positive ways each person dealt with their reactions to trauma and loss so that they could build on these strengths and skills, before adding new skills.

What we found is that they had a great capacity, even in the midst of poverty, to honor guests. This skill is something they took pride in and considered it part of how they defined themselves as Afghans. Their attitude toward guests was that of deep caring, kindness and patience. Regardless of who would come or how long they might stay, to an Afghan, any and all guests were cared for and accepted as important and deserving of attention. The skill of honoring guests and the attitude of patient kindness were the same as those skills needed by a Focuser to be with whatever comes inside. Once we all honored the Afghans' skills, we were able to support any existing skills that were weakened because of the violence in their lives, as well as to offer new skills in a way that would fit the best.

The Afghans chose to develop four skills:

- The ability to process and hold their personal traumas
- The ability to pause and then listen
- The ability to listen to family, friends, neighbors with non-judgmental kindness
- The ability to sleep at night without drugs

We would like to discuss one of the skills that they wanted to practice: learning to pause and listen, without advice or comment or judgment. And this was easy to add to

their already existing skills of caring for guests (which included kind conversation with their guests) with time and practice. As we worked on core skills, we found that we could match their need to listen without advice with an important “bit” that Focusing had to offer: Holding Presence with what comes.

- The attitude of patience
- The attitude of kindness and calmness
- The attitude of gentle listening
- The attitude of compassion

We found that people automatically shared these same methods of supporting positive proficiencies and added new skills as they took what they learned home to their families and communities.

What skills did the Afghans choose to develop?

- The ability to process and contain their personal traumas
- The ability to first pause and then listen
- The ability to listen to family, friends, neighbors with non-judgmental kindness
- The ability to sleep at night without drugs

What attitudes helped the process of healing?

- The attitude of patience
- The attitude of kindness and calmness
- The attitude of gentle listening
- The attitude of compassion

Invitation 5: Now I invite you to bring your awareness into your body again, ground in the felt sense of the moment...Maybe this is a good time to come to gratitude again. Just for a moment, sensing all that comes around that...And when you are ready bring back into your awareness...*all about your community*...Taking time now to hold its needs or wantings or issues...as they come freshly to you in this moment...Sense into what positive skills already exist...What positive attitudes exist right now...Welcome what comes, no matter how small...Wait and check if there is more there...Then, with gratitude for whatever comes, bring your awareness around how it would feel in your body to be with your community or group if these skills and attitudes were reflected in everyday life...take time to hold this. Maybe even asking if there is more here...And be with whatever comes in a Focusing way, with kindness and gratitude.

And when you are done, write down what came.

FINAL STEPS

In the end, it is important to join with the community, holding in a positive way what came, so that this healing process can grow organically. In every setting it is impossible to address all the needs at one time. But it is possible to begin a process that can have far-reaching effects. One question we often ask ourselves is: “If I have only one hour to introduce Focusing and leave people with a skill that will help them, what would I teach?” In fact, any “bit” will help: the Pause, Listening, Being with the Felt Sense, etc.

In Afghanistan:

I want to share an example of meeting a community need using Focusing Skills and Attitudes. Once we knew the Afghan skills/attitudes toward guests, we, together with the Afghans, developed a way to help. We learned that we needed something that would offer people a safe place away from the harsh realities of war and devastation. We were also told that many people in Afghanistan suffer from stress symptoms, including the inability to go to sleep at night or to stay asleep if they do. In fact, according to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, the abuse of over the counter sleeping pills is a major problem throughout the country. So, we thought that one skill that might help would be the ability to *go inside to a safe place*.

Our Afghan colleagues told us that few knew of such a physical place, as they had all lived with war and violence their whole lives. In Islamic and Sufi traditions, such a place is described as part of the *inner realm* where one comes close to the divine. Great! So we concluded that one of the skills they needed was a way to come into that safe, internal place. And this is one of the skills we learn in Focusing. The corresponding attitudes we wanted to support were those of calmness, kindness and caring. We designed an activity that we called “the Safe Place” (or the Calm Place) where participants would first think of a calm, beautiful place where they would like to be. Then a facilitator would ask the group to close their eyes and lead them through a simple body scan to come into their bodies. We always did this process slowly so that there would be time to feel each part of the body and to sense into what came in their body as they spent time in that place. Next, once they were in the center of their bodies, that space between the throat and the belly, they would be invited to bring this imagined calm place into their body and sit there.

After the group had been in their calm, safe place for about five minutes, they would be invited by the facilitator to bring any feelings that came to them while Focusing back into the room. As people opened their eyes, it was obvious to us who had been Focusing and who had taken a nap. For many people in Afghanistan, this short exercise would have been one of the first times they had a peaceful nap without intrusive thoughts in a long time. Most welcomed the experience and either told us how relaxed they felt or shared that they had indeed slept.

At that point we encouraged them to share what they learned with family members or friends. Many reported that they had someone in their family who would be able to use this

sleep exercise at night. In one group the women joked that they were going to put their doctor out of business since they no longer needed his medicine to sleep.

People caught up in war, disaster or trauma need many of the skills that Focusing provides. Above is just one example. The simple act of coming into the body and then noticing how the body feels when it learns to relax is an example of a skill that can be easily shared. If I had only one hour in Afghanistan to teach one Focusing “bit”, *relaxing* and finding a *safe place* is probably what I would share, because *the safe place* also helps to develop calmness and caring kindness.

It was important to work through this process with each group as their needs can vary. In Afghanistan we found that, although there was the common overriding theme of war and trauma, each community we entered had its own issues that *wanted attention*. Working as a team with those who would benefit from Focusing helps guarantee participation and sustainability.

Invitation 6: Now I invite you to return to the notes you made through the various invitations. Review what you have written as you went through the process.

Now, bring these invitations into your awareness and hold each part, as a gift to be held or something alive to be nurtured...Wait with them, seeing what comes as you hold them together...What newness comes in this space between them? Pay close attention to what the body holds around all of this....

Some way forward may come...Hold that with gratitude as a gift...Appreciate what comes and thank your body for the wisdom it holds for you.

Maybe when you come to the end for now, write or draw whatever came.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

In developing Community Wellness programs that incorporate Focusing, we met the community members at the level of their issues or needs, not ours. As we moved forward in Afghanistan, we found that the niche most open to Community Wellness work was in the field of teacher training and classroom management. In the end we worked with teachers, non-profit organizations, UNICEF and government ministries to include Focusing and psychosocial wellness training for pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers in Afghanistan. Those programs are continuing long after our most recent visit in 2009. By working through an organic process of program development and the crossing Focusing with community needs, we were able to grow programs that made sense at the local level, and which also were fundable by donor agencies.

We did not know where the whole process would lead, but we trusted that it would benefit someone along the way. It never ceased to amaze us when we would meet a teacher in a remote village of Afghanistan who would proudly show us a certificate that she had earned in Community Wellness Focusing. And there were more than a few times that we wondered, at the end of a workshop, if people picked up something useful. Once after a very brief introduction of Focusing to a group of Afghans, one young woman, who clearly attended because her supervisor wanted her there, left, seemingly to me, to have done little more than nap and talk to her friends. I thought she must have felt as though she had wasted her time. Two years later she met Nina Joy and told her that what she learned in that short workshop had saved her life.

Community Wellness work and Focusing seems to be very similar to what happens when you plant a flower garden from seed packets. You can only guess at what the end result will be. Nina Joy and I had no idea what our work would look like when we started but we look back and see so many surprising and delightful areas of growth—green plants and gardens of Focusing and wellness in so many places.

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ENLIVENING RECOVERY AND EXPANDING FELT RELATING

Suzanne L. Noel

“...the release of addiction’s hold requires awareness: awareness of where we keep ourselves hobbled and stressed, where we ignore our emotions, restrict our expression of who we are, frustrate our innate human drive for creative and meaningful activity, and deny our needs for connection and intimacy.”

—Gabor Maté (2010, p. 399)

Recovery Focusing was born in August 2008 at Costa Rica Recovery Center when the Director, Jim Dopp, welcomed me to come in and try the new process I was envisioning at that time. Since then, it has grown to be one of the most enjoyable practices in which I have had the honor and pleasure to participate. Recovery Focusing has transformed my life into one that is full of playfulness, love, and happiness.

In this article, I share a bit of my history with Recovery, then with Focusing, and how these two life-changing paradigms came together to create this new, enlivening group process called Recovery Focusing, out of which emerged the “H.O.W. We Heal” model for working with groups.

I hope to show how Recovery works, as it relates to a Twelve Step Program and Fellowship, and how it enabled me to embark on a joyous journey of self discovery and healing which was made all the more alive by Focusing. I also outline my “H.O.W. We Heal” model, show how Focusing enlivens Recovery, and how Recovery enhances Focusing. Finally, I offer a few suggestions on further ways in which Focusing may be integrated into a Twelve Step Program of Recovery.

RECOVERING MY TRUE SELF

Twelve Step Programs of Recovery are peer-based support groups that help participants find ways of coping with life that do not involve drugs, alcohol, or compulsive behaviors. The Program considers addiction and other dysfunctional behaviors to be a physical, mental, and spiritual dis-ease. Its basic philosophy is that the key to a stress-free life is establishing and continuing to improve our connection with ourselves, other human beings, and a Higher Power (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 1952). One of the premises of the Twelve Steps is that we help ourselves by helping others. This premise gives us permission to ask for all the support we need at the beginning, knowing that someday we will be able to pay it forward.

I came into Recovery in 1998, trembling, terrified, and broken. Lonely, depressed, and strangled by self-loathing and shame, I was facing a devastating personal tragedy. Spinning inside a confusing tornado of painful emotions, I felt as if I was slipping into a dark well of despair. It was as if I had lost myself somewhere along the way — as if there was no real ME anywhere to be found, just this empty shell of a human being, tortured by the reality of the life I had created. I felt dimmed and wilted, dead emotionally and dying physically. As we say in some Twelve Step rooms, I was given “the gift of desperation”.

The miracle occurred when on a hot August afternoon a Twelve-Stepper asked me how I was. Unexpectedly, with tears streaming down my face, I said, “Not well. I need help.” And, at that moment, I stood at the turning point: I could stay on this treacherous path, heading straight over that edge into madness or death; or I could take a step in a new direction. Someone had offered me their hand. By taking it, I chose the new direction.

Thus began my journey on the Twelve Step spiritual pathway. I had surrendered.

Hungry for guidance, I did everything that was suggested to me by my sponsor. A sponsor is a person in Recovery who willingly helps newcomers by showing them how to work the Steps. The Twelve Steps involve specific actions that were suggested as a “Program of Recovery” from alcoholism by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (*Alcoholics anonymous*, 1976, p. 58). They are considered to be a spiritual (not religious) pathway involving a personal journey of self-awareness within a community of like-minded souls.

The Steps helped me have a relationship with a Higher Power of my choice: the creative life force and the power of Love and loving. Working through the Steps with a sponsor taught me how to process suppressed feelings in a healthy way. Each of the Steps showed me who I really was and revealed to me what was not working in my life. They offered ways of replacing these patterns with values and principles that make my life more manageable. By acknowledging and owning my “shortcomings” and sharing these with another person, I became willing to let them go. Making amends for the harm I had done released me from my resentments and enabled me to forgive myself and others. Participating in the fellowship by going to meetings taught me how to listen to others, to empathize, and to share my own experience in order to give it meaning. I found a sense of dignity and integrity that I had never known.

I went through quite a personal transformation in my thinking, in the way I felt, and in my behavior. The last three “maintenance Steps” help me continue to take a personal inventory, to pray and meditate in order to connect with my Higher Power, and to connect with others through service work, like sponsoring and going to meetings. Essentially, the Steps helped me heal my relationship to myself, to my loved ones, and to the universe.

THE POWER OF FELT RELATING

In January of 2001 I assisted in a two-day Focusing workshop with Dr. Robert Lee and Margarita Brenes. I had always loved working with groups (in the university and in the Peace Corps). This workshop was a powerful example of how people can be together

to process feelings and situations in a way that is grounding, respectful, and surprisingly enlightening. After this workshop, I decided to sign up for their Certification course in Domain Focusing. I had been hoping that I could someday facilitate groups and help other people who had gone through a similar personal tragedy.

Focusing is a simple practice that involves pausing our narrative and attending inside our bodies. When we hold an issue, situation, or feeling and ask, “*How is this inside me?*” we may get a felt sense of it. A felt sense is an experience that has meaning. Our bodily living of situations has a particular *feel* and it makes *sense* — thus, the term *felt sense*. As we stay with this inner experience, it comes into ‘focus’ with a word, image, metaphor, gesture, inner part, etc. that is a “handle” or symbol for it. This symbol helps us understand how things are for us. When it is just right in terms of capturing our experience, we usually feel a physical release or shift (relief) that is often accompanied with insights. We feel differently and we think differently. Small steps forward may be revealed.

Focusing helped me to peer past the waterfall of tears that enveloped me into the dark cave of pain within. It allowed me to symbolize this pain and my situation with symbols that spoke clearly to me, such as images that told my story better than words ever could. Attending inside with a welcoming attitude allowed my feelings to be held within a safe embrace of empathy. It brought me into a calmer space of ease. The processing I did during the weekly Focusing/Listening exchanges of my training kept me sane.

I was so overwhelmed with grief that Robert Lee had to regularly guide me into exploring Self Empathy. Integrating Self Empathy into my life was another gift of Focusing. The beauty of Self Empathy is that it is specific to each person, each situation, each felt sense. If I couldn’t be kind to myself one day, perhaps I could be loving or compassionate. If I couldn’t be loving or compassionate for myself in a certain situation, perhaps I could be patient or forgiving. Maybe this felt sense needed some far away, curious company, while this other one needed a friendly embrace.

Making contact and spending time with my bodily-felt awareness within a Focusing/Listening partnership supplemented my Recovery by showing me how to find my inner truth. Being with myself and another person in this deeply intimate and empathic way (Felt Relating) is an act of love with tremendous healing power because, for me, the worst of the traumatic events of my past and of my dysfunctional behaviors was that I was alone with my overwhelming feelings. Within the caring inner and outer embrace of Felt Relating, I was able to let my body make sense of the nonsensical. Furthermore, when listening, I escaped myself and was able to be fully present to the other person. It was a kind of meditation. Listening made me feel good about myself because I was being there for someone. Focusing partnerships are egalitarian relationships: win/win for both partners as we journey inward together to open up our body’s wisdom.

In effect, the kit of spiritual tools I picked up with Recovery, combined with the relief, clarity, and sense of moving forward that Focusing brought into my life, allowed the true, loving, playful, authentic me to begin emerging. I had changed. I had a sense of integrity and wholeness.

During my training and after, Robert Lee would often nudge me into finding a way of introducing Focusing to the Twelve Step Fellowship. I couldn't imagine how to do this. Twelve Step meetings and the Twelve Step pathway worked. Why fix something that is not broken? How could I market Focusing to a program that believes in attraction rather than promotion; meaning, it does not advertise itself? Recovery is based on passing something on in order to keep it—how could I charge money for Focusing training to Twelve Steppers? These and other questions blocked my way forward. Though it made sense to me that Felt Sensing was a gift to Recovery, having received so much from it myself, I did not know how to *cross* the two.

RECOVERY FOCUSING

“My brain is so numb I can only think in metaphors.” (Client in treatment)

At the 2004 International Focusing Conference in Costa Rica, I led an interest group on Focusing and the Twelve Steps. We met in a circle but did not know how to proceed. It was quite amusing actually. There we all sat: we knew we were interested in this possible crossing, but had no idea how to actually interlace these two life-changing practices. All I could think of doing was to invite the group to Focus into Focusing, then Focus into the Twelve Steps. Discovering that moment's inner experience of Focusing and the Steps was illuminating for all of us, but the two remained separate, as if seeing each other through glass, but unable to actually make real contact.

In 2006, I began exploring the concept of Recovery Focusing with Rob Foxcroft. These sessions helped me understand how these two “circles” (as I saw them) shared many of the same ideas. They were both about personal change through togetherness. They had similar guidelines for safety during partnerships and meetings (no commenting on or giving advice, etc). They both valued empathic, respectful listening. There were many other ways in which these two mind/body/heart healing practices resonated with each other, but for the sake of brevity I won't detail them here.

Rob's empathic and careful listening solidified my knowing that the healing that happens in Focusing is due to the relating, not just the attending inside. It is the *interaction with another person* itself that enhances the interaction with our own inner experiencing, opening up spaces that are not possible without that connection. As Gendlin maintains, during these human encounters, our responses interact with each other and carry forward our experiencing, bringing forth solutions that previously were not available (Gendlin, 1964, p. 116).

I continued Focusing with Rob, finding more and more similarities and getting more in touch with the transformative power of both Focusing and Recovery. But still, I couldn't figure out how to make these two practices work together.

Then, in August of 2008, after a Twelve Step meeting, I met the director of Costa Rica Recovery Center. He mentioned that he was looking for a bilingual counselor to work at his center. I told him I was a Certified Focusing Trainer who had ten years as a committed and practicing Twelve Stepper, that I was fully bilingual, and that I had an idea for a new process called Recovery Focusing. He told me to come in on Monday and start.

Just like that, my career as a Recovery Focusing Facilitator began! The fact that I had been Focusing on it with Rob Foxcroft gave me a confidence in this *crossing* that I may not have had without our many sessions. I knew in my body that the two processes were “soul mates.” (And body-and-mind mates as well.)

The Beginning

I went in to work that Monday, not really knowing what I would do. In the Recovery Focusing group I invited people to “go inside and wait” for something to come about alcohol or their addiction. I decided to make my Focusing instructions easy to follow for people in Recovery. This is because I knew I was dealing with all levels of physical, mental, and spiritual damage due to addiction and the trauma that causes it (and later accompanies it). These people have severely low self esteem, plus anxiety, anger, depression, personality disorders, etc. They have a total disconnect with themselves and others. I needed to make Focusing available to anyone, in a gentle, respectful, simple way.

Not only did I know that people have different abilities to feel things, but I had assumed people in withdrawal from drugs could not get a bodily-felt sense, as traditional Focusing emphasizes (I soon found this was not true). In my years of teaching Focusing, I had found that people have different *ways* of discovering felt meaning. For example, incest survivors I had worked with could easily get images and gestures that captured exactly how they were living a situation, but could not feel anything inside their central trunk (throat, chest, belly). Most addicts are sexual abuse survivors. I did not want to push anyone in any way or trigger PTSD reactions. I wanted them to honor themselves, respect their own sense of safety, while at the same time being curious and allow something to come “from within,” whatever “within” meant to these “Hungry Ghosts” as Maté calls them (2010).

I have heard from more than one Focusing Coordinator that they prefer to consider Focusing to be of the realm of metaphor and imagery, and thus, they do not mention the body in their therapy sessions. As my own Focusing has developed, paradoxically, I no longer need to solely “focus” into my central trunk (unless that is what is needing my Focusing attention). What I most regularly receive from inside are illuminating images that reveal to me exactly how I am living an issue. I consider Focusing to be the language of the soul as much as of the body.

Due to all of the aforementioned, I decided to flip Focusing upside down: I would not mention the body until after inner symbols came. That is, I wanted people to welcome *anything* that came, be it a word or a phrase, a feeling tone or mood, an image, memory, song, etc. Robert Lee calls these “Avenues INTO Felt Sensing.” Once something meaningful came, I invited them to then feel this in their body, as follows: “*And, if you haven’t already done so, hold whatever came to you and ask how this is in your body. What is the feel of this? Wait. Notice how this is in your throat, chest, or belly, or maybe in your whole body. Once you have the felt sense, try to describe it, again, with a word, or image, or song, etc. And if nothing comes, no worries. We’re just checking.*”

I used (and use) the words “feel” or “felt sense” after inviting them to welcome whatever came to them. Of utmost importance to me was that each person could find their personal meaning about whatever we were Focusing into. If they could only think of what it meant to them with a word or phrase, this was OK. If a song came, this was wonderful! If an overall feeling tone emerged, this was good enough. The idea was to reduce shame and to make each person feel that he or she was included in the process. I wanted them to feel safe to share whatever they needed to share by letting them know there is no “right” way. Our unique way of finding meaning is...our unique way. This resonates with the principle of Recovery that we each work our Program in our own way (though with the help of others) and that all are welcome as they are.

At times I worry that this perhaps is not, technically, Focusing, in the classic sense of feeling something directly in the body. Yet, it doesn't matter. In time, people are able to sense more in their body. It's like this: an alcoholic came back in to treatment after a relapse. He was cut, bruised, and trembling. One could see he was in a lot of physical pain. I invited the group to hold the word “*God or Higher Power and wait for something to come from inside you about this.*” When it was his turn to share, he said, “I don't feel anything. I just feel this deep happiness.” It broke my heart wide open! Is this “deep happiness” not a felt experience? Yes, it is. He might not have been able to locate this somewhere in his physical body, but he felt it as an overall experience.

This is group Focusing. It's about making contact with the essence of a shared *something*. In a group, we don't have time to explore our felt experience by entering it deeply, as we do in Focusing partnership or Focusing Oriented Therapy. Yet, this process of briefly touching into our felt sense, together, is enough to have a powerful impact in each of us. AND, the overall felt experience gains meaning because it is being crossed with the felt meanings of others. *What we lose in depth we gain in breadth.*

This “keep it simple” approach of welcoming anything that emerges from inside has worked beautifully for these groups. Everyone is heard. Everyone is part of the process for each other. Each person's responses helps the felt sensing process of the others.

By not emphasizing or concentrating solely on physical sensations, new possibilities open up—new possibilities that the person might not have had access to previously. People make contact with a general feel or mood. Often, for example, clients say they feel “lighter, with more energy.” They use phrases such as, “My body feels calm and happy.” “I feel strong and confident.” They are able to notice and appreciate the overall shift in how their body feels. Of course, specific body location is regularly noticed. “It is as if a heavy bag of rocks has been lifted off my shoulders.” “I feel an empty dark hole in my stomach that is sucking everything into it.” Generally speaking, sensing into the more negative aspects of addiction often brings localized bodily felt senses in the chest or belly, but the carrying forward feel of “Recovery” is a more global sense of feeling better.

Many things started emerging for people. Images, feeling, gestures, songs, body sensations came to show us how addiction was lived inside us. Our personal felt meaning of whatever we were Focusing into was revealed to us. It was quite moving. Furthermore, this

“attending inside” was *interesting* to all of us: we don’t know what is going to come from within. It’s a surprise! Thus, an atmosphere of interested curiosity is created, and a felt resonance that is quite...fun. The symbols that come tell a story that speaks to all of us.

After a few days, I began Step One with Robert Lee’s technique of “Getting Help From Your Past” from his “Macroshifting” model. I invited people to remember a time in their lives when they had been happy and fulfilled while clean and sober. What a positive impact this idea had on the whole group. They were able to share in the joy of that happy time and experience it directly in their bodies, now. I told them that this was a reminder that their bodies know how to feel good without drugs.

I then invited them to spend some time thinking about the last year of their using or drinking, then the last few months, then the last week. I wanted them to get a sense of the progression of the dis-ease. I told them to hold this “powerlessness” and the unmanageability of their lives and “go inside and wait” for anything to come from inside. After a long pause, I asked, “*What is the worst of this? What does this need?*” (Gendlin, 1981, p.60). Below are two examples of responses:

“It is like a flower wilting in the dark. My body feels like it is in lock down...the jail doors are closing. The worst of this is that I feel trapped, with no way out. As if I am frozen in a winter storm. This needs for my inner core to be transplanted. Care in a new environment...with a field of flowers. It’s important that I be in a field of similar flowers.”

“I feel dirty, sneaky. Cluttered inside. Tightly knotted. The worst of this is that I was doing it even if I did not want to do it. This needs to be cut off. To turn my back on it and never look back.”

The answer to what they needed came from *them*, not an outside authority. This part of the process was very moving. The pain, despair, and hopelessness of people’s “bottoms” came strolling into the room as a clear, felt presence. We sat together in awe by the fact that we had commonly survived the grim reaper.

The principle within Step One is honesty. By coming out of denial and accepting our powerlessness (which implies we need to remain abstinent in order to begin healing), we were already receiving the higher power of honesty. Felt sensing makes this honesty all the more real, more felt, more *right here now*. (The power of each principle within each Step is received directly with Focusing). We were already *doing* Recovery.

Imagining life without our drug of choice or acting-out behavior is almost impossible for many people who self-soothe in these ways. I then decided to invite the group to envision and feel into “sobriety.” Wow! They each got a felt sense full of meaning about this idea. I eventually started asking, “*What is the best of this positive feel of Recovery?*” This question widens, deepens, and expands the newly-discovered FEEL of Recovery and thus helps protect it from cynical, or critical inner voices. We feel physically and mentally able to hold the best of Recovery. Thus, it is no longer a distant concept. It is now a lived reality.

“I got an image of giving flowers to others...being willing to share happiness...like giving something alive to others. Recovery is like leaving a trail of flowers behind me, and their seeds...and making the planet a more beautiful place.”

“I feel tall and straight. Without fear. With a calm assertiveness inside.”

“I sense Recovery as cleansing...like reviving life. The best of this is a sense of openness and comfort inside. Hope.”

Yes. Both Focusing and Recovery “revive life.” Sensing into Recovery enhanced the “compare and contrast” approach I was developing. When overwhelmed with craving for a drug or negative behavior, we can choose to use again and feel the worst of it (felt sense of addiction); or, in contrast, we can stay in Recovery and feel the best of that.

With a little creativity, I started applying this same process to each of the Twelve Steps. The way to integrate the Steps with Focusing was now so obvious. We can sense directly into the Step itself. My three-phase “H.O.W. We Heal” model was happening, though at the time I had not named it yet. I would start the group by sensing into something positive. Then, we would dip into the addictive/dysfunctional aspect of the Step, asking what the worst of it is and what *it* (italics again for emphasis) needs. And, finally, we allowed ourselves to imagine and feel the best of Recovery.

This is what came to one person as we sensed into “a power greater than ourselves” in the starting phase:

“Collective synergy. I feel awe and gratitude. I see two people sitting together, creating “more” than the two. “One plus two equals infinity.” Inside, I feel open and connected to all things, to the collective conscious. I see concentric circles of light, beginning inside my heart and expanding out to my family, my friends, and outward, encircling everything...I am in their circle, and they are in my circle.”

Making Space for Joy and Togetherness

The beauty of Focusing is that it allows people to find what they need from within. It enhances self esteem. Nothing but gentle guiding is being imposed from outside. Furthermore, because of the specific nature of Self Empathy, each person can find their own right way of being with themselves in this particular moment or with a particular felt sense. Focusing “frees us from self attacking and shame” (Hendrix, 2003, para. 1). Since people new to Recovery are so full of regret and self-loathing, these aspects of Focusing are welcome salves to wounded souls.

This sharing together on this intimate, vulnerable level helps people connect to and empathize with each other, even when it is difficult. I have found that even those with cognitive impairment, or with only one day of sobriety, or who are rejected by the group in some way, are heard when they are sharing from the felt sense. It is *real*. It is *authentic*. It is *felt*. It carries meaning for the rest of the group as well. The interested listening each person receives from the group honors them and their experience. Because of the empathy this relating enables, the group bonds with each other. To some degree, we all experience being loved, or at least cared for.

The circle of the group creates a sense of wholeness, oneness, and togetherness. It creates the experience of “Us.” This is like a safe home where we feel securely held, thus

making it more OK to explore the worst of the addictive process. We are not alone. Together we can face the past, knowing we are actually here, now, working towards a better future. Best of all, we all shift into the feel of Recovery, together, infecting each other with our happiness and well-being. This *is* Recovery: enjoying life to the fullest.

Though I have worked at Costa Rica Recovery Center for over five years, this work continues to be interesting and enlivening for ME! I, too, am interested and surprised. I, too, feel the energy of what is happening. Furthermore, I feel immense gratitude that I continue to find new aspects to my own Steps as I do this work weekly. My own process continues to be illuminating. As a result, I experience more and more happiness in these groups. What a blessing to any person who works in this challenging field of addiction treatment, to find a practice that, rather than burns us out, infuses us with aliveness.

H.O.W. WE HEAL

At some point I decided I needed an acronym to help people remember this process. We use a lot of acronyms and simple slogans in Recovery; such as H.A.L.T. When we get “Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired” we are in danger! H.O.W. is another such acronym: by learning to be Honest, Open-minded, and Willing to change, we are learning a new design for living. These acronyms and slogans are sometimes all we can manage to remember about the program when we are in early Recovery, for they carry much meaning.

Because of the three-phase process I was already doing in my groups, it was easy to come up with “H.O.W. We Heal.” We heal by Honoring ourselves and each other with a positive felt experience, Opening a pattern that is stuck so that it can carry forward, and Welcoming the best of the feel of Recovery. The phrase “H.O.W. We Heal” captures for me the amazing group process of “Healing Through We-ing,” as I often call it (thanks to my friend David Young, who originally coined the word, “We-ing”). A few years ago, I also came up with the acronym P.A.U.S.E. to simplify the Focusing movements. Much is written about the Focusing pause (Hendrix 2003). This acronym stands for: Pause. Attend Unconditionally. Symbolize Experience. For addiction, I use Pause. Attend Urgency. Symbolize experience with Empathy.

ENHANCING RECOVERY WITH FELT RELATING

Focusing can be integrated into our Program of Recovery in many ways. These are detailed in my *Recovery Focusing in Manual*, available at www.lulu.com. Below I summarize a few of these, which would be enhanced if practiced within a Focusing/Listening exchange with another person.

- We can continue to apply the H.O.W. process as we work the Steps, or daily as we explore what is needing our attention or causing us stress.
- The Focusing P.A.U.S.E. for addiction (Pause, Attend Urgency. Symbolize experience with Empathy) can bring relief from triggers that cause intense craving.

- We can Clear a Space around what may be in the way of our serenity or in the way of working a Step, letting the block transform itself into a stepping stone.
- We can start the day with Self Empathy, asking, “How do I need to be with myself today? (Can I be kind, friendly, patient, forgiving, compassionate, supportive, etc?)” We wait for our body to answer how we need to be with ourselves. Self Empathy can be visited as we make amends and work other Steps as well.
- We can do a mini Step Ten (personal inventory) by: a) honoring ourselves by reviewing what we did right (and sensing the feel of this); b) opening what is stuck by exploring what we wish we would have done differently (and noticing the body feel of this); and c) picking a Recovery behavior which may replace our dysfunctional behavior and let ourselves imagine and feel the best of this.
- Regarding our practice of Step Eleven (prayer and meditation): We can pause to enjoy the feel of any prayer; clear a space before meditation; pause to sense into the feel of serenity, and spend time appreciating our connection to our Higher Self and Higher Power.
- And, finally for our Twelfth Step of service and carrying the message, we could engage in Co-Sponsorship through Focusing Partnership; as Sponsors, we can invite newcomers to pause while applying the H.O.W. Model to the Steps; and we can begin hosting “Focus-IN Recovery” circles.

Not long after I started facilitating Recovery Focusing groups regularly, I felt as if I had stepped across one atmosphere into another. The new mood was one of a deep sense of well-being and gratitude. I felt a connection to the planet and to living things that I had never experienced before, at least not quite so completely. It was as if the new vision I gained with Recovery was enhanced by felt sensing, helping me see things more clearly and feel them more directly with my whole self. I hope this new, en-lightening vision can someday illuminate the Recovery pathway for others.

Twelve Step fellowships are spreading throughout the globe. Millions of people are finding relief from addictive processes and dysfunctional behaviors by coming together, working the Steps, and living life based on principles and values that keep them connected to themselves, each other, and the creative energy of the universe. Perhaps someday many of these circles will be Focusing oriented or *Focus In Recovery* circles. Felt sensing and felt listening will infuse these meetings with more love, joy, and empathy than we can imagine. Well, I can imagine.

And the feel of this is strong under my feet and solid behind my back, while the rest of my body is loose and fluid, wanting to sway and dance, smiling through and through. I feel a warm light glowing in my heart center. As I stay with this, a song by Bruce Cockbrun comes to mind: “Making contact...swimming in the ocean of love.” By making contact with our felt sense together, we make contact with and swim in the ocean of love, rather than drown alone in the dark well of addiction. Thank you for listening!

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CROSSING THE WORLD'S NEED WITH THE ENTREPRENEUR'S FELT SENSE

Rona Shafrir

Entrepreneurs setting out into the world are motivated by an internal sense of urgency. One could define their felt sense as being extremely strong, and as containing what Eugene Gendlin calls the “entrepreneurial instinct,” that is, an implicit sense of the “right next step” in the world. The explicit, or the manner in which the implicit sense is given expression, is the entrepreneurial act itself. Like creative individuals working in other fields (artists, scientists, and so forth), entrepreneurs seem, in many senses, to be “natural Focusers”—people who are attuned to their felt sense and who act from it, often in contrast to the accepted norms governing their environment.

Yet entrepreneurship, like every creative act that promotes innovation, also involves difficulties and fundamental dilemmas. Below are a number of salient examples:

- What is the nature of the innovation that I am offering? (i.e.: what lies *there* beyond what I am capable of putting into words right now).
- Is the suggested innovation moving in the right direction?
- Does this innovation stand a chance of being accepted? (i.e. of being funded, recognized).
- Am I in danger of paying an exceedingly highly personal price if I move forward with this initiative?
- How should I respond to criticism directed at me (personally) and at the entrepreneurial project I am promoting?
- How will I know if I am wrong, or if I should be going in a different direction?

In recent years, I have worked with a large number of entrepreneurs, both individually and within the framework of various groups and organizations. The work processes we undertook together were designed to promote concrete initiatives, while also providing support for the entrepreneurs themselves and for the connection between internal life-forward movement and the movement of the project in the world.

When I first began working with entrepreneurs and creators in various fields, I enthusiastically tried to introduce them to Focusing in the same way I had studied it: closing one's eyes, scanning the body, turning attention to its center, and searching for a felt sense. I found that these initial invitations provoked significant resistance: the people I worked with were developing a demanding project, and their stance towards life was for the most part active and somewhat impatient. The slow rhythm of Focusing, the quiet and deep intonation, and the consistent process of reflecting back did not suit most of them.

At a certain point I thought that Focusing was simply not compatible with the demands of individuals working in this sector. And yet, my felt sense insisted...my sense was that Focusing offers depth and ‘carrying forward’ that is relevant to any person in any field. Yet how to achieve this goal? In the following account, I describe some of the ways I developed teaching Focusing in order to answer this question.

HOW DOES FOCUSING SUPPORT THE DILEMMAS FACED BY ENTREPRENEURS: CASE STUDIES AND PRINCIPLES OF ACTION

1. What is My Vision? Working with Implicit Precision

Mike came to me after many years of working as a television editor and producer. He had decided to found an independent company that would specialize in producing programs on environmental issues and bio-technology, which would be partially funded by companies interested in promoting their products or by various agencies interested in promoting environmental issues.

At this point, the most significant dilemma was how to define Mike’s vision in a manner that would awaken curiosity both in companies and in broadcasting agencies. Mike felt that his idea “sounded unexceptional and not exciting enough.” He wanted us to hone his vision and formulate a “key statement” that would also serve as the new company’s logo.

My response surprised him: I suggested that we start by blurring his vision of the project...rather than sharpening it. Using Gendlin’s concept of implicit precision, I said: “We’re looking for the *inner sense* that compelled you to set out on this new path. On one hand, this sense is unclear; yet this unclarity contains the new component...the unique thing that you are offering. This is the life-promoting element that led you to leave your previous job and found your own company. Yet in order to do this, we must put aside the desire to create a clear, sharply defined message, and agree to *listen* to what is novel, blurry, and vague.”

We began the process by clearing a space: Mike raised concerns and fears, while I wrote each of the issues that came up on a separate sheet of paper and asked him to locate each sheet in the surrounding space in accordance with its degree of urgency. Among other things, Mike raised issues such as time pressure, the position of his business partner, the fear that he had nothing new to say...and more.

After clearing the space (which we did with open eyes and in the course of what appeared to be a regular conversation), I asked Mike to pay attention to how he felt right now, with all the sheets of paper laid out around him. He said: “The sense is more open and lighter. I see it right here in front of me, and that helps me.”

At this point I invited him to think back to the sense of urgency that he had experienced before leaving his previous job. The invitation was: **Can you remember that sense of urgency? What it was trying to push you towards?**

Mike described his sense of urgency as similar to that of someone who must pass through a door before it closes. The urgency had tried to get him out of what he defined as “a

world in disguise,” and into what he described as “the world of real people.” We gradually went deeper into this sense. Among other things, I asked Mike to stand next to the door while I stood outside the room and shut it. I asked him to notice what his body wanted to do when the door closed, and what words arose from the body.

At the end of this Focusing session, Mike had a very clear sense of the new direction he wanted to go in: he was interested in working with agencies and companies that felt a similar sense of urgency: ones who wanted to “walk out the door” and tell the world how their company was trying to change the way people live.

Mike’s redefined vision: working with companies and other agencies motivated by a sense of urgency and a need to communicate their message to the world. As he put it: “We are not going to approach these companies merely by offering a service, but rather as people who share their sense of urgency and who can relate to their deep motives.” He ended this session with a sense of deep relief, as well as wonder: how did Focusing *know* how to draw a connection between the sense of urgency that led him to leave his job as a producer and editor, and urgency as a catalyzing principle, as a vision and mode of action?

FIRST PRINCIPLE OF ACTION: ACCEPTING A STATE OF “TEMPORARY BLINDNESS” IN ORDER TO EXPLORE WHAT IS NEW

Venture capital funds that support technology entrepreneurs—as well as various agencies and authorities that support social entrepreneurs—require them to formulate a precise, clearly defined vision and message. This demand is understandable from a business point of view, yet it often results in projects that are hardly innovative, or are not related to the entrepreneur’s true passion.

Focusing offers entrepreneurs a safe environment in which to experience a state of “temporary blindness” in order to explore a new sphere, an implicit precision that translates itself into a clear statement.

I find that clearing a space by using note paper supports the process more than turning to the body, since every entrepreneur needs to have an overview of the field at stake. Yet it is also important to recognize the entrepreneur’s difficulty in entering this state of “temporary blindness” and to make room for this difficulty, as well as to work at the rhythm and degree of depth that are right for him.

The potential difficulty for the Focusing Guide in this situation is over-identification with business-related demands and a desire to achieve quick results. For me, the solution to this difficulty is related to an idea discussed by Gendlin in his article “Implicit Precision.” Gendlin argues that logical precision and implicit precision are deeply related: “Implicit precision is not unlogical. It generates logical precision.” (Gendlin, 2012, p.2)

In other words, the logical idea (“I must formulate a clear definition”) does not contradict the idea of process (“I must turn my attention to the vague, fuzzy sense that led me to embark on this journey”). Indeed, turning attention to the process will eventually give rise to an even clearer and more precise definition.

2. Entering States of Flow

The first stages of working on any entrepreneurial project require a great degree of creativity, as well as adherence to a clear, consistent process. The entrepreneur begins with an original idea and a general outline of a possible course of action, and usually assembles a small team to support him as he begins to develop his idea. Yet progress is not linear, but rather happens in fits and starts: days and weeks of despair and a sense of having no clear sense of direction, followed by sudden forward leaps and a wave of new ideas.

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, (1990) who has conducted in-depth studies of creativity, has shown that a state of creative flow arises when the right amount of tension is created between a high level of skill and a challenge that lies slightly above the existing level of skill (an exaggerated challenge will impede the possibility of flow). Creative flow is a state in which we are fully immersed in what we are doing, are “united” with the process, feel that solutions arise of their own accord, and are free of critical voices or an observing consciousness.

There is no doubt that a state of flow is highly supportive of an entrepreneurial project in its first stages of development. Such a state allows for the resolution of difficulties and the overcoming of conceptual obstacles and seemingly insoluble problems. Yet can Focusing facilitate entrance into such states? And is Focusing itself a “state of flow”?

The answer to the second question is complex. Focusing is a state that includes flow, yet is not a classical flow state. Focusing may transport the Focuser to vague, image-laden realms that lead to carrying forward, yet this carrying forward cannot always be understood in practical terms. I find that in order to allow entrepreneurs to successfully enter a state of flow, we must carefully define our invitations and move, like a pendulum, between invitations that appeal to an internal, personal sphere, and ones that are oriented towards implementation in reality. In addition, we must be familiar with the principles of flow states and rely on them as we work.

Example: The “Green Runners” are a group of social entrepreneurs intent on promoting an innovative urban project in Tel Aviv. I met them after they had been working together for several months. They had entered a state of frustration and were at a loss as to how to move on. Roni, one of the entrepreneurs, agreed to try a Focusing approach with the entire group. After meeting with the group members and listening to a brief description of the project’s current state, I offered the following invitation: **“Let yourself feel the challenge you have set out to meet with this project. Where is it right now in relation to your body? Higher? Lower? About your height?”**

Roni described the project as being about as high as the ceiling, in a place he could not reach. He also described the frustration experienced by him and his colleagues. “Perhaps we’ve chosen a challenge that is too big for us, a task that we cannot fulfill,” he said. I suggested resisting the temptation to jump to conclusions, and just continue to feel the challenge. I then offered another invitation: **“Can you sense what capabilities or skills you are missing, in order to make progress with this project?”**

Roni paused for a while, and then described the skills. He felt that there were very many of them and that they were very scattered. He felt that some belonged to members of the group, while others “aren’t present in the room.” At this point I invited him and his colleagues to take the set of wooden building blocks I had brought with me and to cover them with notes describing the skills they already had for the project. I asked each participant to say something about what he had written and invited Roni to gather the blocks and decide what to do with them. He built a graduated structure and added several more blocks which he described as “skills still missing on our team.” He was also able to offer a partial description of these skills.

I invited him to feel the challenge as he experienced it right now. Had something changed? Roni said that the challenge was no longer up by the ceiling, but rather “just a little over our heads, so that we can almost catch it with our hands...” He added that the main challenge concerned the group itself: how to involve additional people in the project, so that they could contribute the missing skills.

I asked about his most dominant sense concerning the new challenge, and about what he needed in order to meet it. I also asked him to take some time before answering. Several minutes later, he answered: “It’s surprising. Our entrepreneurial team needs to go on a trip together...to feel we have embarked on a journey and to sense our closeness to one another. Only after we get closer will we be able to draw additional people to support this project.”

In conclusion, I asked for responses from the entire group. One of the most significant responses was: “What happened was surprising on one level, yet after Roni spoke, it seemed almost obvious. As if it were the next obvious step that we hadn’t been able to see.” Most of the participants identified with what Roni had sensed, and felt that his insights represented a shared space. One or two of them said they had additional ideas, and I invited them to share what they sensed and to expand upon what the group already knows.

SECOND PRINCIPLE OF ACTION: USING PHYSICAL SPACE TO CREATE A PENDULUM MOVEMENT BETWEEN INTERNAL EXPERIENCE AND REALITY

An entrepreneur is a person operating in a very real world with clearly defined demands and pressures. Focusing facilitates the creation of a clear pendulum movement between invitations that suggest how the situation may be sensed from “within,” and ones that connect the Focuser to a sense of reality. I discovered the advantages of using physical space during a workshop on Wholebody Focusing with Glenn Fleisch, and later with Kevin McEvenue. A number of ideas based on their work play a highly significant role in working with entrepreneurs. I have found that the space in which the physical body moves and is present is more accessible to entrepreneurs than the classical Focusing space (that of turning attention to the center of the body).

A question such as: “Where is this challenge located in relation to your body right now?” invites a sense of the body in space, yet is non-threatening because it “appears to

be external.” Similarly, the use of blocks, sheets of paper, and additional props supports the ability to move between internal sensations and suggestions for concrete action without experiencing resistance to the process.

3. Finding the Right Direction From Within the Felt Sense

The following phenomenon is very familiar to entrepreneurs: the exciting and turbulent period devoted to the consolidation of a concept and to the initiation of a work process is sometimes followed by a loss of direction: nothing seems to work: experiments fail, the funds that were promised are not delivered, some of the partners give up, and there is a sense of being stuck. At this stage, support through Focusing turns in the opposite direction than the one described above: we are not looking for what is still vague and unknown, but rather for a sense of inner knowing about the right direction.

Otto Scharmer, a senior lecturer at MIT and the founding chair of the Presencing Institute, has developed Theory U as a model for cultivating a sense of inspired inner leadership with a clear vision in both individuals and organizations. Scharmer interviewed dozens of leading entrepreneurs worldwide, and his conclusions are based on an analysis of these interviews. He uses the term “downloading” to define the type of situation I described above—i.e., a situation in which an individual (or an organization) is operating according to conditioned, pre-programmed patterns. The model developed by Scharmer offers a method for shifting from a state of “download” to one he calls “presencing” (a term closely related to the terminology of Focusing)—a state of wide presence that leads to action. In order to move in this direction, Scharmer suggests considering three questions:

1. What information do I take for granted? (the download data).
2. What do I see, clearly and without judgment, when I observe the situation directly?
3. What do I feel? What is the deep sense of the situation?

Scharmer argues that these questions enable individuals to get in touch with a reality that is larger than them. He adds that this point of departure may give rise to an action that emerges of its own accord, and which can have a significant, powerful impact on reality.

Scharmer’s third question obviously relates directly to Focusing. Yet the two questions I would like to discuss in greater depth are the first and second questions, so as to identify how crossing them with Focusing can bring about a significant shift.

When an entrepreneur feels that “nothing works,” he is relying on reality-based data as well as on his interpretation of it. For instance, the data may be that the investor we appealed to during the pre-seed stage (that of raising the initial capital for the project) declined to invest. Our interpretation is: the project is going in the wrong direction, and we stand no chance of raising money. Yet is this interpretation actually right?

In the course of Focusing on the first question (“What is your download?”), I suggest that the entrepreneur write down all the facts on one sheet of paper, and all his interpretations on another. We distance the sheets of paper from one another to the point that he can

sense an ability to distinguish between facts and interpretations. Interesting invitations at this stage include:

- **What is the sense that arises when you notice the difference between facts and interpretations?**

I often suggest that the entrepreneur determine the *right distance* between the list of interpretations and the list of facts, and decide when it is sufficient to produce a shift and a sense of relief. Oftentimes, the feeling will be remarkably positive, leading to a different interpretation of the facts.

- **What lies beneath the interpretation? What internal or external voice is present there**

This invitation suggests a meeting with the inner critic in order to examine its impact on decision making. This process enables the entrepreneur to recognize both internal and external critical voices and to identify to what extent they influence him and blur his vision.

We begin Focusing with the second question: What do I see directly? By drawing a personal map that describes the situation as the entrepreneur sees it. The map is schematic, and represents the elements the entrepreneur is concerned with and the relations between them (which are charted using arrows). I then suggest that the entrepreneur carefully observe what he drew and describe it in detail, without interpretation.

We then go on to work with a number of invitations. Some examples include:

- **What is the sense that arises as you describe the details? What are they trying to teach you?**

The concept that guides me is that the map itself is a type of felt sense, which contains implicit information. The details the entrepreneur describe are the “living edge” of this yet-unknown information, and contact with them will enable carrying forward.

- **What do you know about what is imprecise in the map? What would you change about it so that a more precise sense arises?**

The idea here is that when we identify what is imprecise...something in us also knows what is precise...I often invite the entrepreneur to draw the new picture (that is, to draw the felt sense of the “right” situation). This picture can then lead further in a new and more promising direction. This strategy makes indirect use of Eugene Gendlin’s invitation: If the picture was what it was meant to be, what would it be? Yet in order to create a more concrete connection to reality, we work with a schematic drawing of a map.

Visual representations have wide-ranging potential in attempting to find new directions that “feels right.” Once the potential is revealed, one can feel a palpable energetic shift

in the room—excitement returns, new ideas are raised, and the general sense is of *carrying forward*.

THIRD PRINCIPLE OF ACTION: IT IS POSSIBLE TO FOCUS DIRECTLY ON OUR IMPLICIT KNOWING, AND TO IDENTIFY THE RIGHT DIRECTION “FROM WITHIN” THE WRONG DIRECTION

Entrepreneurship is a series of directed actions. The entrepreneur comes up with an idea, and starts moving in the direction that appears most promising. Along the way, however, he is often required to re-navigate and find a more precise direction. In a state of “feeling lost,” there is a built-in tendency to return to old patterns (for instance: despair, anger, a tendency to repeatedly perform the same action, and more). Classical Focusing may prove supportive in this state, yet the new direction will not always reveal itself.

The third principle points to a valuable possibility: we carry implicit knowledge about the right direction. Something knows... Just as the poet senses the first line of a poem by identifying what words are not right so the entrepreneur can sometimes sense the right direction by identifying what feels wrong. (Gendlin, 1993).

I have found that applying Scharmer’s ideas as a basis for Focusing invitations opens up new possibilities. The difference he posits between “seeing something with crystal clarity” and “sensing something deeply,” for instance, helped me to define invitations that unfold on two different levels, with the first level (“What do you see?”) serving as a basis for the second level (“What do you sense when you see?”). Some people seem to have an easier time connecting to a felt sense when they create a visible picture of the parameters pertaining to the question or problem. These applications are worthy of being further developed.

FOCUSING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

Focusing with entrepreneurs (as well as creators in other fields) can take place with open eyes, while using a fairly normal intonation. Reflections will also be offered in a matter-of-fact tone.

1. It is unnecessary to offer any explanation about Focusing or to try and conceptualize its meaning. Most entrepreneurs and artists are not interested in understanding the process (they have no interest in my profession...) but rather prefer to get to the issue itself.
2. It is preferable to begin the guided Focusing session by diagnosing the problem at hand. It is advisable to use external props (drawing a map, working with notes or sheets of paper in space), in order to enable the entrepreneur to work with his felt sense in a clearer, more spatially embodied manner.
3. The use of physical space is highly significant. Entrepreneurship is a mode of action in which a person’s inner feelings are related to the field in which he operates. The felt sense of the “field” is just as relevant as the person’s felt sense of himself.

4. It is extremely important that the entrepreneur leave the meeting with practical ideas for action. A Focusing session that ends with no more than a sense of an inner shift is insufficient for most entrepreneurs. It is thus advisable to devote at least half an hour during the meeting to the question: Where does all of this take you? What can you do with the information that arose here?
5. As Focusing guides in the entrepreneurial arena, we must be familiar with its work conditions with the various stages of entrepreneurial processes. Focusing in this world invites a relatively active focuser, who holds a wide perspective on available possibilities.

Some Reflections, Reactions, and Thoughts about Future Development:

My thinking about the use of Focusing in creative processes grew out of a personal need: as a writer and an entrepreneur of various projects, I was both surprised and excited to discover how easy it was to enter the creative process by relying on my knowledge of Focusing tools: I began “experimenting” in the “laboratory” of my personal computer. For instance, I examined my felt sense as I prepared to enter the writing process, and then turned to see if I could get a felt sense of the story itself, as if the story knew “what it needs in order to carry itself forward.” I went on to see how I could work with a felt sense to plan a workshop, and how to use Focusing to work with something that had yet to come into existence (such as an idea that still needs to be developed).

Reflecting back on this process, I can identify several interesting points: as I already noted, many creative individuals and entrepreneurs can access their felt sense in a quick, intuitive manner. At the same time, they do not operate in the creative sphere out of a sense of presence, but rather out of a sense of total identification with whatever arises. Moreover, an understanding of how the process unfolds provided me with a greater sense of calm and confidence—with the sense that even if things remain unclear right now, they will become clearer as I continue to sit with them. This sense of confidence grew from one Focusing session to the next, and later also, enabled me to feel confidence in supporting others.

Finally, I discovered that it was possible to Focus in additional ways and with different types of felt senses that I had not encountered as a Focusing student—such as the felt sense of the field, the felt sense of something that was not yet present in my life yet, whose absence was felt, a felt sense of the next step I should take, and more. These personal discoveries gradually provided me with the courage to work with creators and entrepreneurs.

The reactions I have received in recent years are highly encouraging. I use Focusing in working with individuals (entrepreneurs, creators, and others interested in promoting their projects), as well as with groups and large entrepreneurial projects. Most of these individuals experience the process as highly beneficial, and often note the element of surprise and discovery. There are also, however, those who view the process as strange and not practical enough.

These positive reactions offer encouragement for further exploring creative ways of working with Focusing principles in a direct and easily palatable manner. In order to do so, I have formed a group of Certified Focusing Trainers with a special interest in the fields of creativity and entrepreneurship. This group is currently exploring additional directions that bring together Focusing, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Some subjects of exploration include:

- What inner stance should the Focusing guide formulate in a situation that demands action (such as working on a project?) How can one be an active guide while remaining without an agenda and avoiding identification?
- How can one, in the context of Focusing, make use of the entrepreneur's previous success stories in order to create forward movement from a state of being blocked? This is where we use the ideas put forth by Gendlin in TAE concerning textual analysis and work on inherent connections.
- In the entrepreneurial and creative fields, one often creates pilots or models. Is it possible to construct a Focusing model (i.e., a series of Focusing actions that may be adapted for personal use) that can enable the entrepreneur to consistently support himself throughout the process, without the help of a guide?
- What is the optimal way to create a sensory connection between the entrepreneur's ideas and dreams and between concrete actions?

This new collaborative process of investigation obviously relies on Focusing, as well as on other creative processes, and is accompanied by a sense of true excitement. There are still many questions requiring our attention, yet new paths seem to be opening up. The temporary name of this new sphere—which connects the depth of Focusing to the performance of creative, concrete actions in the world—is “FocusingFlow.” We look forward to receive reflections and feedback on these ideas, and to continue carrying them forward in the world.

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PART 3

CROSSING IN PSYCHOTHERAPY



THE INNER JOURNEY: Focusing and Jung

Leslie Ellis, MA, RCC

While Jung and Gendlin's theories have many striking differences, they are in agreement on something quite fundamental: that the act of looking inside, of spending time and attention with what is interior, both felt and imagined, is a worthy and therapeutic endeavor. Focusing is clearly a method that engages inner process, but arguably the most influential pioneer of inward journeys is Carl Jung.

One of the most important crossings in the inner process work of Gendlin and Jung is the field of dream-work. Gendlin's dream-work methods incorporate many Jungian techniques but with a key difference: in Focusing, the final arbiter of dream meaning is not the therapist armed with expertise in symbolism and theory but the dreamer's own bodily-felt sense. Because I have recently written in detail about Focusing and dreams (Ellis, 2013; in press), this article will focus on the more fundamental processes of Focusing and Jung's active imagination, which are both methods of listening inside and interacting with what we find there. (This can include, but is not limited to, dream material). I hope to demonstrate that despite a difference in emphasis on body (Gendlin) or image (Jung), there are many ways these processes overlap. And where they differ, there are ways they can work together to deepen and enhance the other.

While Gendlin (1986) said that Jung offered "deep and indispensable insights" in his writings about human life, archetypes and dream-work, he took exception to the fact that Jung mainly offered theories and interpretations of dreams and images rather than encouraging and exploring the patient's direct experiencing. Gendlin (1974) noted that Jung said very little about how to actually conduct psychotherapy, and that the psychological writing of the time seemed to be focused on content rather than process. This is mostly true, however some of the instructions Jung provided about how to work with patients using active imagination suggest that Gendlin and Jung were not always so far apart in practice.

In fact, many of Jung's methods are process-experiential, and there are instances in his writing where the experience of the patient is stressed over intellectual interpretation (Jung, 1928) and where he follows the client's lead in the therapy process (Jung, 1961). In this article, I will briefly touch upon theory of the unconscious and how Gendlin advances this with his philosophy of the implicit. I will then demonstrate with clinical examples how the crossing of Focusing and a modern Jungian approach provides a way to practice psychotherapy that takes something from both great thinkers: the emphasis on the image and active imagination from Jung, and the importance of bodily-felt experiencing from Gendlin.

In any good crossing, the cumulative effect is always greater than the sum of its constituent parts, and I have found this to be the case in combining Jungian and Focusing-oriented therapy. The methods complement, enrich and deepen each other: Gendlin

brings experiential depth and ‘life-forward’ movement with his focus on the body, while Jung brings imaginative richness and numinosity with his deep fascination with the image.

The ‘unconscious’ as incomplete process

I will begin with a brief theoretical note because it has a bearing on how one might go about crossing Jungian and Focusing-oriented practices. It concerns the notion of the ‘unconscious’ which was treated, at the advent of the practice of psychotherapy as a great storehouse of hidden content that needed to be unearthed or ‘made conscious’ if the patient were to heal. The importance to psychology of Freud’s and Jung’s discovery and elaboration of the theory of the unconscious cannot be overstated. However, as with most theories, it is a helpful but imperfect lens through which to view the psyche, and I would suggest that Gendlin’s revision of this theory adds to its value.

Gendlin does not view the unconscious the way Freud or Jung conceived of it. He wrote, “When ego or self-systems are said to exclude some experiences from awareness, usually it is assumed that these experiences nevertheless exist ‘in the unconscious.’ Our discussion, however, leads us to the conclusion that they do not. Something exists, to be sure, but it is not the experiences as they would be if they were optimally ongoing” (Gendlin, 1964, p. 24). Gendlin stated that what exists instead is a narrowed or blocked interaction or experiencing, an interrupted or unfinished condition, in short, an *incomplete process*.

Gendlin continued: “The felt datum which is there, in a sense, contains everything. In what sense does it? In the sense that, *given fully carrying forward responses* to it, everything will be here as aspects of ongoing process” (Gendlin, 1964, p. 25). Later in the same article Gendlin described the difference between content and process more simply: “Content theories assume that one completes the process of knowing, experiencing, interpreting, reacting but that some of this process does not reach awareness. The present theory holds that the process does not completely occur” (1964, p. 38).

As an example, suppose something unfortunate happens to my friend ‘Susan’ and a few days later she comes to realize, maybe in talking it through with me, that she feels angry about it. Gendlin argued that to have a strong feeling and then bury it is less plausible than the notion that one was aware of something, maybe a physical tension or a feeling of dissatisfaction that “must be responded to and carried forward. Only thereby does the process go to completion and anger” (p. 38). In the example, it is more likely that Susan did not fully experience and then repress or forget their anger, but rather that she had not yet fully felt the anger; it was there as a potential not yet developed fully.

How might this be useful in practice? This revised theory would still allow for the idea that thoughts, conclusions and actions that would result from explication, but which are vaguely felt as unacceptable, may be blocked and not be carried through. Gendlin would say these do not then become ‘unconscious’ (i.e., completely unavailable to our senses) but rather they become implicit, unfinished processes that are held in the body in some form such as somatic sensations, general anxiety, tension or other symptoms. The point Gendlin

(1964) stresses is that these pieces of unfinished process are *in awareness*, even while their full meaning is not. This is where Focusing can help move the situation forward because it invites the person to welcome what is implicit, and then allow it to fully develop. Once the felt sense is carried forward, there will be a sense of remembering, as though what came was already known. To fully articulate the truth of the situation can come as a great relief, even if the truth is painful.

A beautiful example of this kind of relief was provided by Nowick who described how Focusing helped her come to terms with her son's struggle with addiction, not by providing a solution, but by allowing her to feel into the truth of how bad the situation was and how completely helpless she was to do anything about it. At first, when she sensed into her felt sense of the whole situation, she felt terror in her body, but it slowly transformed into "a vague downy comforter" that she could relax into...

And at that, I felt a gradual release of tension throughout my body, as though I no longer had to fight against how deeply grieving and exhausted I truly felt. For here, in my gut, was the simple, stark truth: I was helpless against his addiction. You might suppose I sank into even greater despair at this insight, but just the opposite happened; my spirit was lifted! Huge waves of relief poured through me...(2013, p. 153).

According to Gendlin, "The more we focus directly upon the felt meaning and the more of it we symbolize correctly, the more relief we feel" (1964, p. 12). The Focusing process does not change the situation, and in fact, can bring one to realize just how dire it really is. But still, this brings relief. "Even when the solution seems further away than ever, still the psychological tension reduction occurs, and a genuine change takes place...it changes the whole manner in which one experiences" (p. 13-14).

Sticking with the image

The view of the 'unconscious' as unfinished process is one way that Gendlin's philosophy carries Jung's forward. Gendlin seems to provide a better explanation for the methods Jung was already using.

Now the converse: how does a Jungian approach add to Focusing? One of the main biases from my early Jungian training that I could never bring myself to fully abandon, even after years of Focusing, is the primacy of the image. While imagery is considered a part of the Focusing process, the felt sense is primary. In a Jungian approach, the image is treated with the same reverence and attention as a Focuser treats the felt sense.

Gendlin (1984) suggested that the image is just a *part* of a situation, a visual representation that is only one of many possible meanings one could make of a situation. The Focusing process, on the other hand, works with the *whole* of the situation and the body's natural forward-implicating. In my practice, however, it has not always been my experience that the felt sense will carry forward more so than the image. Often, living images have the

quality usually ascribed to a felt sense; they unfold and represent far more than what one could explicitly say about them. They operate with a certain autonomy such that they can interact with us as much as we can interact with them. And, like Focusing, the process of active imagination is seen as a natural human tendency that was discovered, rather than a technique that was developed. “Jung reminds us that active imagination is a natural, inborn process. Although it can be taught, it is not so much a technique as it is an inner necessity” (Chodorow, 1997, p. 3).

I have worked with many clients whose process is moved forward more deeply by image than by bodily-felt sense alone. It is not as though the body’s felt sense is absent in these cases, just that it is not the prime mover. Sometimes it is attention to the image that keeps the felt sense vibrant. For example, in one personal Focusing session, I checked inside and what came to me was the image of a horse, a chestnut gelding with a shaggy, unkempt winter coat. The horse was circling a track, and as it progressed, its step got livelier, its coat shinier until, by the end of the lap, it was brimming with youthful vigor, its coat coppery and gleaming. While there was clearly a felt sense in my body in relation to this image, if I stayed just with the bodily sense, the felt sense lost its potency and forward momentum. However, if I stayed with the living image of the horse itself, I sensed its increasing aliveness inside of myself.

This exhortation to “stick with the image” (Hillman, 2004, p. 21) is a central tenet of the school of archetypal psychology, a branch of Jungian psychology that is most compatible with a Focusing-oriented approach. Archetypal psychology is not only concerned, as the name suggests, with Jung’s idea that our dreams and images can carry universal meaning. It is also an experiential, image-oriented and relational approach to Jungian psychology that modernizes and moves it away from a purely ego-driven and personal approach toward a more ecological, interactive view of inner world as inseparable from the outer world. This moves a Jungian approach closer to Gendlin’s process model that views all living things as interactions inseparable from their environment.

The following is an example from my clinical practice of how attention to the image itself can carry forward differently from the felt sense that comes *in response* to the image. For my client, a woman in her 40’s who came to therapy for treatment of severe anxiety, images always appeared immediately upon clearing a space and checking inside. Recounting and experiencing the inner events depicted in these progressions of images always brought forward movement. Asking the client to sense into her body about its *response* to the images brought a completely different process that was often uncomfortable and not as helpful. This may be because the client’s anxiety was very body-oriented, and she was highly attuned to her physiological sensations. While Gendlin (1964) has suggested that turning toward an uncomfortable felt sense often dissipates the discomfort, this was not always the case for my client. Also, deliberately attending to the body pulled her away from what seemed for her like the most natural process. When asked to check inside, she immediately saw vivid, living images. These images repeated but with progressive changes through the course of our work together. They seemed to parallel her progress.

One of the most striking series of images was of a young girl in an underground bunker. She was neglected, disheveled, non-relational, and non-verbal. As our work together progressed, my client was able to gradually establish a connection with the girl, who then started to interact more and to look more grown-up and well cared-for. The encounters with the girl, who eventually emerged out of the ground and into the sun, were always filled with emotion. And these encounters seemed best left to speak for themselves without interpretation or process guiding. The visceral felt sense of the image was clearly present, and yet the image itself had a life of its own.

If ever I did specifically ask for a felt sense of the whole of the experience, the client would most often get an empty and very uncomfortable feeling in her stomach. Sometimes it was a great gaping hole, and other times, it felt stuffed and bloated. The sensations were usually strong and almost unbearable, and with gentle attention, they would often move through a process where they would eventually calm or lessen in intensity. Yet the original images would vanish, and the session would become something quite different than it would have been otherwise. My sense of it was that the encounter with the images, and staying with them, brought more forward motion than when I asked the client to find her bodily-felt sense of the whole situation.

This conclusion is counter to what generally happens in the Focusing process. I am speculating that in some cases (such as with those who have experienced severe neglect or trauma) attention to the felt sense, or the whole of the situation as it is felt in the body, might be overwhelming. Images can make inner work more manageable because they are a step removed from the person experiencing them. They can more easily be experienced as ‘not-me’ than an inner bodily-felt sense. While I make a practice of suggesting that the Focuser find a little distance from a too-intense felt sense, this is not always as easy as getting a comfortable distance from an image, because a felt sense is, by definition, an embodied part of oneself. An image, on the other hand, can feel very *other*, even if it also represents a part of oneself.

Gendlin said that Jung rarely made it clear that “the patient must move his attention *from* the image *to* direct feeling. Only if the patient works with directly felt concretes will there be change. Jung called this the *transcendent function*...If it is ignored, people watch chains of images go by, or speculatively interpret an image, and very little happens” (1974, p. 240). This suggests one can *either* observe the image *or* attend to the directly felt sense. I think it is possible, and often advisable, to do both. The felt sense and image formation can happen in either direction: an image can evoke a felt sense, and a felt sense can evoke an image. While Focusing-oriented therapists will always privilege the felt sense, sometimes in doing so, something vital is lost.

It strikes me that there are many different kinds of images. There are daydream images of passive fantasy that may be enjoyable but are unlikely to engender growth or change. There are the images that come in dreams or active imagination that are imbued with life, mystery and power. And there are images that come from the felt sense that provide a picture of what a person is experiencing inside, images that change as the felt sense moves the process forward.

The steps of active imagination

Engaging with powerful, living images is at the heart of Jungian active imagination. Although in his writings Jung did not provide much information about how to actually practice this method, he deeply engaged in the process himself, and spoke about it often (Cwik, 1997). This allowed others close to Jung to describe the process in more detail. For example, Marie-Louise von Franz, who founded the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich and worked closely with Jung for more than 25 years, described four steps of active imagination. These are an expansion on Jung's two steps, simply put: allow the unconscious surface and then come to terms with it. Von Franz's steps flesh these out and share some processes in common with Focusing.

Step one is to empty the mind, which is like clearing a space, although in active imagination the client is invited to go into a deeper meditative state than when one does when clearing a space.

In step two, the image is sought, focused on, and objectified in some form. Images can come from a feeling, life situation, or dream image, as well as from a felt sense. Von Franz (1978) identified two common mistakes at this stage: to 'fix' the image so nothing further happens, or let the fantasy run wild so it changes too quickly to truly engage with.

The third step is to give inner images and fantasies form in a concrete and material way, such as inner dialogue, painting, sculpting, movement, or poetry. There is some debate about whether to use a medium in which one is competent or not: the unconscious can express itself through mistakes, but we cannot be nuanced in a medium in which we are clumsy. Von Franz (1978) said the main point of making the imaginal concrete in some way is to *engage the body* in the work. In this way, even if the client is moving through a series of gestures or painting a picture rather than quietly sitting and sensing inside, there is something happening that is similar to Focusing; there is an ongoing dialogue with an inner felt sense that feels meaningful and moving.

The fourth step is what von Franz (1978) calls the *ethical confrontation* with the preceding steps. In Jungian terms, one's ego needs to come to terms with the imaginal. One must "have it out" with the unconscious (Cwik, 1997, p. 152). In other words, one should allow oneself to be affected by the image, and as well, possibly make some impact on the image itself by interacting with it. The Focusing process is useful here as the engagement is very similar to the way one would engage with a felt sense. Finally, one has to apply what has been discovered to ordinary life, to live out what seems to be called for by the interaction with the image.

The underwater woman: a confluence of Focusing and active imagination

The following is an example of a blending of Focusing and active imagination. "Joan," a client in her early 60s, who was devastated by the loss of her husband of 30 years, dreamt that she was taking care of a very young child for a strong, wise woman who lived underwater in a cold, torrential current. It took all of her strength just to hold the child and hold on to something to anchor her, but she was not afraid and could tell she possessed strength. This image of "just barely holding on" was a powerful metaphor for her life situation.

Both Focusing and active imagination begin with attention inside to a life situation, dream image, emotion—something that will bring a felt sense. Though the language differs, finding the sense of something living and interactive in the inner realm is the starting point for both processes. In sessions like the one I have just described, I can't always tell where Jungian and Focusing techniques begin and end. I tend to use them interchangeably; they feel to me like the aspects of the same process, but with different language or emphasis. One benefit of starting with a living image like this one is that it brings a clear and tangible felt sense that is easy to find and stay with.

For Joan, the whole of the dream image brought a powerful, complex felt sense. She could work with that, and we also separated out certain places to interact with: the environment, the child, the wise woman. The process helped her to feel in her body that she *did* have the strength to hold on, though the grief process often felt as if it were sweeping her away. She expressed wonder that the woman whose child she was tending could live so easily and comfortably in such a cold, inhospitable place. Yet there was a surprising new feeling of knowing she was going to be fine, and also that the child would be fine. Sensing in, she found the assurance that she could manage the situation, but also that she did not want to live there. She felt comfort in knowing that her visit to the harsh underwater world was temporary.

The wise woman was a helpful force in the dream. Even though she was absent, there was a sense that she would be back soon. In the session described and others that followed, my client engaged in an imaginal dialogue with the underwater woman that put her in touch with her own personal strength and wisdom. This is a common technique in active imagination, and the woman could be seen to embody an archetype. Over the ensuing months, the living image returned when it was needed most. The wise figure tactfully communicated something of the relative nature of Joan's situation: that it was a small thing in the grand scheme of life. She also brought Joan the embodied felt sense of an ability to manage adversity with grace. And Joan did just that. Her grief process was long and, at times, intense. While the wise woman dialogues and other Focusing/imaginal work like it did not change her life situation, she was able to change her experience within the grief process, to increasingly rise above it and become aware of her own strength.

The ultimate goal of any inner process is to develop a relationship to what is encountered inside. Whether one calls it the unconscious or the implicit, or whether one privileges the body or the image seems to me to be less important than the attitude or spirit one brings to the process: ideally one of openness, curiosity, even *reverence*. In both Jungian active imagination and Focusing, there is deep respect for inner life and a belief that it is only through attending to and interacting with what is inside that one can live authentically and engage the outer world with one's whole self.

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STEPPING THROUGH BEAUTY

The Art of Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy

Robin Kappy, LCSW

“‘Carrying forward’ and ‘crossing’ are two more-than-logical concepts I have introduced. In the crossing of two intricacies, each becomes implicit in the other insofar as it can. This is an extremely precise implicit process. When we enter into this implicit effect, we find that the new possibilities are much more precisely differentiated than what we had before.” —Eugene Gendlin

INTRODUCTION

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.” —Marcel Proust

My passion for drawing and painting began in the late 1960's, in my early teens. Needing solitude, I sought refuge in the woods and fields surrounding my school, and began studying and drawing the trees that both protected me and kept me company. I found connection and nurturance in nature. In a similar vein, in the late 1980's I was inspired by a deeply meaningful and beautiful psychotherapy experience. As I entered the professional field, my aim was to use my life experience to assist others in ways similar to how my therapist had helped to meet my relational needs and create a more satisfying adult life.

What motivated me to initiate a crossing of the intricacies of relational Focusing-oriented psychotherapy and creative process is my desire and need to integrate my personal and professional passions and interests. While learning to draw and paint realistically, I find fundamental concepts, questions and experiences related to art, creativity and beauty applicable to my work as a psychotherapist. Life itself is creative, and beauty is one of the most significant inspirations for creativity in art and psychotherapy. In both art and the art of psychotherapy there is the possibility for gaining connection, understanding and knowledge and creating something new, valuable and beautiful, in familiar and unfamiliar terrain.

IMPLICIT BEAUTY

“Beauty: the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit.”
—Miriam-Webster Dictionary

Creative phenomenon, possibilities, and beauty are all around and within us. However, when obscured from our awareness, we consider ourselves to be less-than-beautiful, living in a less-than-beautiful world. When in dark places, this essential part of our natures lie dormant, out of the creative flow implicit in living, but when creative, we feel ourselves to be living most fully, with a greater sense of health, wholeness, balance, harmony and meaning. Guided by our bodily felt aesthetic sense, we create and move forward towards fresh interactions and experiences.

Leonardo da Vinci said: “Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else.” We *see* beauty when we experience it: viscerally and instinctively (by how things look, feel, and sound), behaviorally (by how things perform and are learned), and reflectively (through what things mean, as infused with experience). Beauty is an essential and deeply nurturing ingredient in human connection, nature, and every deeply meaningful creative and relational experience.

BEAUTIFUL ESSENCE

“Look closely. The beautiful may be small.”— Immanuel Kant

The beautiful Yin/Yang symbol comes to mind. It is a wholly balanced, symmetrical, harmonic, creative representation of the universe. “The love of the beauty of the world...involves...the love of all the truly precious things that bad fortune can destroy. The truly precious things are those forming ladders reaching toward the beauty of the world, openings onto it.” (Weil, 1951, p.116) It is “out of the question” to experience a balanced universe or “the love of the beauty of the world” when we are in distress, reeling at the discordant qualities of ugly, destructive, traumatic things, events and experiences. And still, the potential is available to find balance, and create meaning and beauty, even in its smallest forms, as we move forward.

I use my 2011 blog entry here as an illustration:

“I am reminded of one of the very worst days of my life: 9/11/01. I was living in the West Village in New York City, getting ready to see a client in my near-by office. I am sometimes preoccupied with thoughts and projects and do not pay particular attention to the weather. However, before “it” all happened, this was a not-to-be-missed early morning. The air and light were as crystal clear and colorful as could be, there was a delightful quietude in my morning and the hush in the air as the day began felt just right. A friend called me on the phone and, as always, I was delighted to hear his voice.

However, he had called to alert me to the events that were beginning to rupture the world. I ran down my street to the place where 6th Avenue, 8th Street and Greenwich Avenue meet, a well-known crossroads. While I stared up at the World Trade Center, to observe where the first plane had struck just minutes before, I also looked over to see people staring up in shock with me. As I recall

now, there was already a sense of confusion and bewilderment at how the trauma of what was happening and the beautiful day that held us in sunlight were there all at once.

I am still awed by the people I experienced those first moments and days after the events. Like the sun that day, we were kind and respectful to one another in such generous and gentle ways. People cared for each other without question. At this most painful of times, we found nurturance in each other's presence; the meaning of beauty. Through all of life's terrible experiences and disconnections, though we may often forget, this deeply meaningful and beautiful essence of our connection with one another is present in our humanness."

ART AND PSYCHOTHERAPY LESSONS

"Creativity involves turning one's attention from the well-articulated explicit form in which one interprets something, to ones as yet unformulated felt sense of the whole situation—exactly what effective psychotherapy involves."
—Gendlin (1968)

My excellent painting teachers taught me a very important lesson about painting anything well (portraits, landscapes, still lives, abstractions): the implicit beauty of the underlying design in a composition is the most essential ingredient. I was taught to work from "the general to the specific": the larger design, masses and composition set the place for smaller details in a work of art. There is a well-balanced pattern of lights and darks in the most successful paintings and, while creating a realistic drawing or painting, it is important to give one's full attention to the larger masses of interacting shapes, edges, values and colors before focusing on smaller details. The believability of a realistic painting does not come solely from its subject. Instead, it is the larger relationships between the subject, the space around it, the light and shadows that grace its forms, and the manner in which the entire picture is expressed through the artist's skilled-facility and aesthetic felt-sense, that brings life to a painting.

In a Caravaggio, for example, figures, compositional elements, details and highlights are placed within the context of the relationships of larger forms and the edges of the canvas as a whole. In some passages the darks define the lights and in others the lights define the darks. Forms relate, moving in and out of each other softly, organically, and beautifully. Caravaggio interacts with the viewers and their felt senses through the world of the painting. For many, this is a beautiful experience.

Such artistic lessons serve me well as a psychotherapist. My starting point for a drawing or painting begins with interacting with the beauty of what I am seeing and experiencing relationally. The balance of lights and darks define the forms. I begin by being present, observing and experiencing the whole of my subject in relation to the setting and to myself. I am seeking to gain understanding as I am observing. Having spent many hours drawing and

painting, along with developing conceptual and technical facility, my felt-sense is my most consistent and important medium. When learning to paint or draw realistically, relationships between angles, shapes, colors and edges are approached very academically. Having gained enough technical skills to better reflect my perceptual experience, my felt sense enables me to *carry forward* something of the beauty and implicit intricacy of the relational experience.

“In psychoanalytic language, we are not isolated minds, but the river of human inter-subjectivity. Psychotherapy is then a new “inter-being,” a new relatedness, a new living, a “new us.” (Preston, p. 16). As a psychotherapist, I engage in a process much like art making; I am opening to and reflecting the beauty of another human being and their needs and co-creating a “new relatedness” out of our inter-subjectivity. A person’s language, narrative, and the “light and dark” aspects of their experience gives shape to the larger forms and “composition” of each session and the psychotherapy as a whole. Details unfold in the context of the wholeness of the psychotherapeutic relationship, as the relational needs of both client and therapist are met.

Psychotherapy is an art: it engages skills acquired through practice, imagination and a mutually creative process to adapt to and meet each person’s relational needs. Marshall Rosenberg, an American psychologist and creator of Nonviolent Communication, states that all actions are (though sometimes tragic) attempts to meet innocent, benevolent, universal, “beautiful” underlying needs. I much appreciate his including beauty as an implicit value of the nature of human needs. From his work as a psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut, an Austrian-born American psychoanalyst best known for his development of Self Psychology, outlined three major areas of human needs and motivation: the need to be admired and to bask in the appreciation of the other, i.e. “the gleam in mother’s eye” (Mirroring Need), the need to idealize and feel close to and supported by a powerful, beautiful, all-knowing other (Idealizing Need), and the need to be with like-minded souls (Twinship Need). Psychotherapeutic interactions meet our need for beauty through positive mirroring (experiencing ourselves as beautiful), idealization (experiencing the other as beautiful) and twinship (experiencing the beauty of relating). Along with learned skills and natural human compassion, my felt-sense is my most consistent and important creative medium when meeting my client’s “beautiful needs”; it allows a carrying forward of the implicit intricacies of familiar and new relational experiences.

BEAUTIFUL INTERACTIONS

“The experience of “beauty” often involves an interpretation of some entity as being in balance and harmony with nature, which may lead to feelings of attraction and emotional well-being.” —Wikipedia

In his book *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution*, Denis Dutton “presents a compelling theory on beauty—that art, music and other beautiful things, far from being simply ‘in the eye of the beholder,’ are a core part of human nature with deep evolutionary origins.” (TED). He states: “People in very different cultures around the world

gravitate toward the same general type of pictorial representation: a landscape with trees and open areas, water, human figures, and animals.” (Dutton, 2010, p.14). When we step back and look at the whole picture, we see our worlds are made up of beautiful patterns and designs that invite and carry us forward (often through very dark passages) towards a broad range of creative edges and relational experiences. In Focusing-oriented psychotherapy, reflecting upon implicit knowing and the beauty of meaning and forward movement nourishes the person and the therapeutic relationship. Sometimes, something “new and valuable” is created and brings a greater sense of balance and harmony, creativity and beauty.

I recall a transformative experience I had several years ago. When starting my first on-site landscape paintings. I set out in search of a place to set up my easel and paint for a few hours. I found a lovely spot, perused the valley scene, and got to work in speedy fashion. However, I did not know how to be present in the landscape or to compose a good design on my canvas. Because I had little experience or guidance, over the course of a few hours my painting became a very uninteresting and muddled version of the scene. I felt stuck in frustration. I finally paused my battle with my paints and quietly observed the vast landscape before me. It was as though the world suddenly turned from a still, dull, monochrome tone to an animated, living world. Colorful flowers that had been there all along appeared to me everywhere I looked, trees seemed to dance in wonderful gestures, shapes and shadows made interesting designs on the trees and earth. All at once I understood that my narrow perspective had limited and isolated me. I stood in reverent awe.

“Every bit of human experience has a further possible movement implicit in it” (Gendlin, p. 13). Various kinds of psychotherapeutic interactions may carry a person through obscured “stuck places” to a broader view and realization of one’s aesthetically beautiful human qualities and values: relatedness, wholeness, connection, vulnerability, empowerment, innocence, openness, curiosity, respect, empathy, appreciation...

My client, J.B., woke up in the middle of the night last night, and his heart was racing. His is a daily struggle: he appears “fine” and “normal” on the outside, but feels physically ill, personally “abnormal,” and misunderstood on the inside. His mental and emotional patterns got the best of him again last night: he browsed the internet mindlessly into late hours, looking at sports scores, munching on snacks, avoiding tasks that seem too hard to do, thinking about his failures, losses and sadness.

And yet, here he is in my office this morning, reaching out, knowing he needs to talk to someone about it all, to connect, be heard, receive some help, and find a glimmer of hope that he can find a way through all of this seemingly physical and emotional distress. He talks about how powerless he feels to perform well at his job as an accountant because his boss’s voice has a strict, critical tone that unnerves him. I silently find beauty in his reaching out, our interaction, the larger view I have of him as a whole person, and his values, potentials, vulnerabilities, strivings and growth. As he talks about his work situation and related concerns, he becomes self-conscious, as he does halfway through most sessions, feeling “self-indulgent” in speaking of himself.

As he continues Focusing, my words and compassion are implicit in my tone and

reflections, *making room* for his shame and acceptance of his feelings. He begins to experience a shift. Our interaction invites us to create a threshold of space where he can have a broader sense of the complexity of his situation and a kind attitude towards his “stuckness.” He has an “aha moment,” realizing that he does a “good enough” job at work after all, even if his boss does not recognize him. He metabolizes the shift and tells me he has a sense of the knot in his solar plexus “moving from a tight to a releasing place.” Like water to a plant, J.B. senses my appreciation and tells me that he plans to try to approach his day with less pressure to “be excellent.” At the end of the session he leaves my office emotionally lighter, nurtured and hydrated. Our “creative relating” had helped J.B. to step back from the details of his troubles, to place them in a larger context, and meet his need for a “new” and creative relational experience.

CONCLUSION

“The object isn’t to make art, it’s to be in that wonderful state which makes art inevitable.” —Robert Henri

We live as neighbors in one whole, big, chaotic, creative, vulnerable, often very messy, ugly, light, dark, sometimes destructive, beautiful world. When experiencing pain, fear, trauma or neglect, our very survival is at stake, and all of our attention is consumed. Still, beauty is implicit in and around us, with its potential to absorb pain, ugliness and destruction, and carry us forward creatively over time. Humanity needs beauty for survival: it attracts us to nurturing things and, in the worst of times, tips our balance of attention in new and life-forward directions.

Both art and psychotherapy facilitate balance and an understanding of complex and relative values. Both artists and Focusing-oriented psychotherapists employ skill, techniques, presence and their bodily felt-sense to carry their work forward towards beautiful highlights. Each brings the potential to awaken us to the realities and beauty of life. When the pain and depth of dark and isolated places provides spare respite, art and psychotherapy each offer the possibility to elevate our spirits and unite us with nature and each other.

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FOCUSING, MINDFULNESS, AND MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY

Three Ways Toward Wellbeing in Everyday Life

Salvador Moreno-López, Ph.D.

Since childhood, I have traveled, met different people, visited many places, experienced new landscapes, tasted different food, and learned about other ways of living. Since then, I have been experiencing and recognizing how people each give their own definitions or names to other people, circumstances, and objects. What seems alike or ‘the same’ has a different name and meaning to each person. Certainly there are similarities and commonalities. At the same time, certain unique aspects exist for each individual.

In order to constructively engage in a conversation about this diversity, something that has seemed essential to me is to start from the things themselves, from the circumstances, from the people and their concrete expressions, within their current context. This is not easy because I can very quickly assume that I understand everyone and the meanings that they communicate through their expressions, or I can hang on to what is similar and miss out on the uniqueness of each case.

When I started to learn Focusing, I found that it was something new and familiar at the same time. Tapping into one’s intuition and that sensation that “I’m feeling it”—the famous Mexican *corazonada* (a feeling or “premonition” that comes from the “heart” about something.) Tapping into one’s intuition, and that sensation that “*I’m feeling it*”, akin to the Mexican *corazonada*, has been a way of experiencing—paying attention to myself—in a different manner than what is normally considered rational. Thus, attending to the body in order to identify the felt sense and realize that a change process was brought about from *there* was an amazing discovery and at the same time a clarifying confirmation.

FOCUSING AND MINDFULNESS IN AN EXPERIENTIAL PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL GROUP PROJECT

Four years ago, some colleagues and I started a project working with women who play the role of caretakers. At the beginning of the workshop, the participants mentioned instances of discomfort and dissatisfaction in their lives. They suffered from insomnia, headaches, muscular pain, upset stomach, and high blood pressure; in addition, they felt pressured, burdened, and oppressed. They felt they did not deserve to rest or get sick, and spent many hours during the day thinking about their problems and concerns. How could we help them develop a sense of wellbeing in their daily lives?

Trusting that we could focus on the participants’ organismic wisdom in order to create new and better alternatives for living, we proposed the creation of an Experiential Psycho-Educational Group (EPEG). The goal was for the participants to learn to:

- Be in inner silence
- Recognize and welcome the felt sense
- Differentiate the felt sense from feelings and emotions, and
- Express themselves directly from their felt sense, through experiencing.

In the EPEG sessions, our starting place was about being fully present for and with all participants, acknowledging one another in interaction, based on just being there with them. Therefore, we felt that it was important to pay attention to our own attitudes, as well as the attitudes that the women demonstrated when they were with each other. Here, we remember some of the attitudes learned in Focusing (Moreno, 2009):

- To be available to receive and to listen
- To be in inner silence
- To be open to allowing ourselves to feel whatever we feel when we are with other people
- To welcome and be present with the felt sense that arises, without trying to change it
- To describe, without judgment, lived experiences and behaviors, and
- To warmly and respectfully welcome people as well as their lived experiences.

The EPEG sessions were based in these Focusing modes of interaction. Later, we proposed a variety of activities to help participants develop these attitudes. Although in my Focusing experience I usually find many activities aimed at promoting this learning, it is also true that at times, these are not enough, given the variety of life conditions and ways the participants interact.

MY ENCOUNTER WITH MINDFULNESS

When we started the EPEG sessions, I happened to come across an article (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) about a stress-reduction program based on Mindfulness. I was surprised to see the similarities between some aspects of Mindfulness and Focusing. Later, I read some books on the topic (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2010; 1994, 2005; Siegel, 2012) and did some activities that were described in those books.

Kabat-Zinn (1990/2010) states that “learning to listen to our body is essential in order to improve our health and quality of life” (p. 59). He also mentions that Mindfulness requires certain attitudes, such as:

- No judging
- Being patient in order to respect life’s own rhythms
- Having a beginner’s mind, open to whatever comes
- No trying or assuming that something specific should happen

- Trusting ourselves and whatever arises from our being, and
- Accepting things as they are.

In searching for activities designed for practicing Mindfulness, I discovered that in some ways Focusing and Mindfulness share a very similar horizon. Before discovering Mindfulness, for example, we paid attention to the sounds in the environment as a way to be only with the sounds, without labeling or thinking about them—just being aware of how we sensed and felt in listening to the sounds. Once I found out about Mindfulness, I discovered a similar emphasis on bringing awareness to what I see or hear that I found in Focusing. It seemed to me that Focusing and Mindfulness have activities and attitudes in common, although sometimes these may go by different names. Finding/feeling these similarities was a great personal discovery.

During my search, I remembered something that I read a long time ago from a Buddhist Master about living in the present: “When you chop wood, you chop wood. When you drink water, you drink water.” Remembering those words gave me clarity about something else Focusing and Mindfulness have in common: with their attitudes of welcoming what is here and being respectful, and with the attention to experiencing, they are both something that can be present in daily life—not just for special moments.

When EPEG participants expressed that they did not have enough time to carry out the exercises, we proposed that one option was for them to figure out a different way of doing some of their normal activities during the week. One participant discovered that while washing dishes after lunch, she could pay attention to the water, the dishes, the soap, to the movement, to her hands—thus engaging in Mindfulness right then and there. I was surprised and curious about her discovery.

She also realized that while she was mindfully engaged, she stopped thinking about her pending tasks and preoccupations; she felt more relaxed and rested, and also experienced a state of serenity. “When I washed dishes with this attitude, my worries went away, and I felt a very peaceful mood,” she reported.

The similarities between Mindfulness and *Clearing a Space* in Focusing (Klagsbrun, Lennox & Summers, 2010) are many. Washing dishes while paying attention to the sensory experience of the task with a mindful attitude seems to have the equivalent effect as the process of setting aside problems and worries in the *Clearing a Space* exercise. Both practices allow people to drop their habitual preoccupations which prevent them from experiencing the underlying sensations of peacefulness.

Since these activities allowed participants stay in touch with the sensory experience of daily tasks and develop a detached attitude toward them, Focusing and Mindfulness were integrated in the project. Paying attention to the experiencing and to the here-and-now was done more often. And the participants developed some attitudes relevant to the felt sense: curiosity, patience, trust, non-judgment, and welcoming.

MY ENCOUNTER WITH MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY (MBCT)

During the early sessions of the EPEG workshop, participants reported having constant negative thoughts. “I spend all day thinking about my problems,” said one of them. “I get tired of rehashing the same to-dos and preoccupations,” expressed another. “I can’t stop thinking. I feel desperate!” said another one, almost crying. They also referred to their feeling sad, bored, tired, and depressed. Some cognitive therapy authors (Knapp & Beck, 2008) have pointed to this relationship between negative thoughts around problems and a feeling of sadness, demotivation, and hopelessness, also noting that as the catastrophic or problematic thoughts disappear, the mood changes.

When treating people with depression within the framework of MBCT, changing negative thoughts and improving the mood is one of the major goals. Some years ago, I developed an alternative way of *Clearing a Space*, which I called *Inner Silence*. It is an aural metaphor, while *Clearing a Space* is a spatial metaphor. I have found that some people respond more easily to the spatial metaphor, and some respond more easily to the aural metaphor. Some activities to promote *Inner Silence* are described in Moreno (2009). One of the participants who used *Inner Silence* said: “My worries went away,” “I put aside my concerns and felt relaxed,” and “I stopped thinking as I usually do.” The group was discovering that when engaging in *Clearing a Space* or finding their *Inner Silence*, their minds got quieter, and their moods changed.

I began to realize that there were similarities between MBCT and Focusing. I thought: “We follow similar processes but explain them differently.” I felt that awareness as a rich opening to new possibilities.

Before the EPEG I didn’t know about MBCT. But then I found an article about the use of MBCT to treat people suffering from depression (Teasdale, Segal, Williams, Ridgeway, Soulsby & Lau, 2000). Later, I found others about treatment of people after they had attempted suicide (Luoma & Villate, 2012; Williams & Swales, 2004; Williams, Barnhofer, Crane & Beck, 2005; Williams, Dugan, Crane & Fennell, 2006). They helped me to think about how I could cross Focusing and MBCT in theoretical, clinical, and experiential dimensions.

From Focusing, I realized that the activities that help to set aside thoughts can be used by themselves, based on the sense of wellbeing that they create in a person, and they can also be used as a preparation stage for removing obstacles to easily connecting and attending to the experiencing. From MBCT I realized that it was important to pay attention to thoughts, sometimes to put them aside for a while, and sometimes to look at them in a detached way. In addition, it is possible to use MBCT theory to explain mood changes that come when doing *Inner Silence* Focusing activities. Here, I discovered that I had “a new language” to talk to MBCT psychotherapists. I felt relieved because at that time we worked in an institution that was cognitive-behavioral in orientation. Now I felt that I had the tools to build a communication bridge with them.

In one of these articles (Luoma & Villate, 2012) there is a reference to something that

the authors call *experiential avoidance*, which is: a “tendency to escape or avoid unwanted thoughts, emotions, memories, and sensations, even when doing so is futile or causes harm” (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follete & Strosahl, 1996; cited in Luoma & Villate, 2012, p. 266). Such “*experiential avoidance* accounts for as much as 16% to 25% of the variance in behavioral health problems generally, including those identified as pathways to suicidality” (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda & Lillis, 2006; cited in Luoma & Villate, 2012, p. 266). In this context, we realized that helping people pay attention, with a Focusing attitude, to their felt sense, feelings, thoughts, and movements could be a way to change that *experiential avoidance*.

A NEW PROJECT USING FOCUSING, MINDFULNESS AND MBCT

The EPEG project helped us to see some possibilities for *crossing* Focusing, Mindfulness and MBCT. The project also showed us the possibility of suggesting to the participants some activities to do during the week between psychotherapy sessions.

This new project, unlike the EPEG, is aimed at providing psychotherapy to adult women who have attempted suicide. The project’s frame of reference includes mainly fundamental aspects of Focusing, enriched with some Mindfulness attitudes and activities, and some additional MBCT explanations and activities, which I will be discussing later in this paper.

Some of life’s daily problems may be understood, in part, as a result of people “being disconnected” from their experiencing, and/or symbolizing it inadequately (Gendlin, 1970). In some cases, people stop living as a process, not seeing themselves as a *valuing center* in any interaction (Gendlin, 1964). The human organism as a *valuing center* refers to the capacity of an individual to know what promotes his development as a human being through sensations in his body/organism and to orient his interactions in everyday life from there. They start living through others, through orders and instructions, traditions, rules, etc., and not seeing through the lens of experiencing. Or they feel trapped in repetitive negative thoughts that hinder their ability to live in the present, listening and looking at their situations with their particular and current characteristics (Siegel, 2012; Williams & Swales, 2004).

When people are disconnected from their experiencing, it becomes difficult for them to find ways of interacting that are personally meaningful and valuable. In these cases, individuals may feel unable to cope with their problems, lacking resources and possibilities that would give them a sense of direction in life and in their daily interactions. These individuals do not perceive themselves as the authors or agents of their lives. If a person perceives their life situation as too painful and hopeless, he or she could consider committing suicide, feeling that it would be a way to alleviate suffering.

We could say that these people live on “automatic pilot” (Luoma & Villet, 2012), without a clear awareness of what they do and what they might be experiencing in their lives, at every moment. Often, their repetitive thoughts comprise the largest part of their world and their relationship with it. Under these conditions, people find themselves in a state of emotional vulnerability vis-à-vis incidents that could alter their state of mind, thus triggering a

process that may possibly lead to a suicide attempt (Williams et al., 2006). Research cited before about experiential avoidance shows its importance as a factor in suicide.

Teaching individuals clearer body awareness could quickly help them to identify when they are on automatic pilot so that other alternatives for interacting could be explored, breaking the vicious cycle. For example, they could attend and follow their breathing for a few minutes or take a pause to attend to the felt sense. These alternatives could allow a person's process to move toward a life-forward direction and far away from the vicious circle of negative thoughts.

From a Focusing perspective, Gendlin (2003) has stated: "without the bodily sense of the situation we could not know where we are or what we are doing" (p. 102). Instead, attending to the experiencing implies connecting to the wisdom of life. When we feel the lived body and the complexity of all the situations in our everyday lives, we discover in our *body/organism* a reliable guide toward our own wellbeing.

Gendlin (2003) summarized these ideas about the lived body when he wrote: "it implies, it urges, it implicitly shapes our next action. It senses itself living the situation in its whole context" (p. 102). From a Mindfulness perspective it is important to be in the present, to be aware of our feelings, thoughts, sensations, movements, without losing touch with surroundings. In MBCT it is important not to be trapped in a vicious circle of negative thoughts and distressing moods. It seems to me that if therapists would take the importance of the "lived body" as a referent, we might have more resources to understand the people with whom we work.

In this psychotherapy project, I acknowledge that as human beings, we are *interactions* with others and with our environment and that those interactions are oriented in a significant way by our "body-organisms." Paying attention to the experiential dimension points to the importance of differentiating among various ways of interacting that may take place in people's daily lives. This idea also implies "thinking differently about our embodied condition: the 'lived body' or the 'experiential body' ... A body that at the same time is material and energetic, rational and emotional, sensitive and measurable, personal and linkable, real and virtual..." (Najmanovich, 2001/2013, p. 17).

Currently, in these times, we find ourselves having many unprecedented life experiences. Social norms, traditions, and cultural patterns are not enough to guide us into living a satisfactory and meaningful life. Perhaps this is why we see everywhere many people who suffer and feel empty, dissatisfied, hopeless, and who live with various diseases (Béjar, 2007; Gendlin, 1993).

We predict that using Focusing and Mindfulness in everyday life interactions will encourage individuals to keep connected to their experiencing, and to interact from there in ways that promote their development. From this perspective, we can say that a person lives her life as an interactive process with other people and the environment. She can make mistakes but redirect her interactions as soon as she realizes something feels wrong. Because she no longer feels isolated, without resources to promote her wellbeing, she feels satisfied with her way of living.

However, there is another perspective. *Non-experiential interactions can be conducive to people ignoring their direct experiencing*, and thus, no longer living as an interactive process. People who allow themselves to be guided by the directives and expectations of others might likely live with a distorted symbolization of their own experiencing. People who are disconnected from others often feel that something is missing in their lives. They are unsatisfied with themselves and their way of living. They sometimes feel lost without knowing why or what to do to find meaning in their lives.

Individuals living in this disconnected way eventually stop listening to themselves, lose the sense of authorship and agency of their own lives, and stop feeling valued. Such individuals start feeling as if they are at the mercy of their circumstances, disconnected from everyone else, without a sense of belonging in this world when it comes to meaningful relationships with others. They ignore the possibility of finding a sense of direction for their interactions. This way of living can clearly be quite limiting when it comes to someone having the resilience to handle life's never-ending challenges.

Gendlin (1993) says: "Nowadays we could not get through the day if we went only by the rules, roles, and routines we were taught. Not that we can do without those old routines, but we have to modify and elaborate them. Many of our situations are now more complex and sometimes unique" (p. 31).

When we learn to be fully present in each moment, we see changes in the way we feel and in our relationship with the world around us. We feel deeply touched by the sky, trees, flowers, and other people. Our relationships and our connections to them become more intimate, sustained by a greater bond. We move toward living with more peace and harmony, feeling that our problems and preoccupations are not always a heavy burden that we have to carry on our shoulders, and paying attention to what we are doing at every moment. We can enjoy more everyday living (Hanh, 2008).

We realize, from our own experiencing, that life can only be lived in the here and now. This realization also gives us a place from which to contrast and question distorted beliefs and thought patterns that create discomfort and suffering, so that we can replace them with a perspective that comes from our own experiencing (Gendlin, 1996; Knapp & Beck, 2008).

Goals of the New Project

This new project will provide psychotherapy sessions from this Focusing/Mindfulness/ MBCT perspective for women who have attempted suicide. The purpose is to help them feel warmly welcomed, valued, respected, and understood in their particular way of living everyday life. In their sessions, participants will engage in experiential interactions so that they can focus on recognizing the various affective and cognitive meanings that their lived experiences have for them.

One of the goals is to facilitate a process through which the participants can learn to be aware of their own experiencing, expressing themselves from there and symbolizing it with precision. In addition, we will suggest home exercises as appropriate to encourage

mindfulness, the recognition of the felt sense, and setting aside thoughts for a while or looking at them in a detached way, also helping them connect to their inner silence.

Our experience in the EPEG project showed us that the women found their own ways of generating wellbeing in everyday life. They changed their interactions with other people and with their own circumstances. We hope that the added dimension of psychotherapy will give participants the opportunity to discover further resources for eliminating suffering and the lack of meaning in their lives and moving toward inner peace, harmony, self-acceptance, compassion, and the construction of meaningful interpersonal relations.

How Focusing, Mindfulness and MBCT Will Inform the Psychotherapy Sessions

The main point is that *the person* in the session is *the most important thing*. The psychotherapist's role is to *be with* the person who is present, "putting nothing in between" as Gendlin (1996, p. 286) says, that is, being mindful and fully present (Siegel, 2012), experiencing whatever comes while being with the person, and moving with that person's own rhythm (Moreno, 2009). This means that therapists will interact with each woman from the therapist's own experiencing rather than being guided by a protocol regarding the use of a specific technique.

Besides that, inviting each participant to be aware of the differences between felt sense, feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and concrete circumstances seems like a rich addition to this project which was not in the former EPEG. Also, we will be proposing that participants look from a certain distance at their felt sense, feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and other people's behavior. In particular, therapists will encourage participants to check their thoughts with their felt sense.

The psychotherapist will suggest some activities for the participants to do during the week. Paying attention to their breathing for a few minutes, three or four times a day, is one such activity. Focusing on breathing is an essential activity that promotes Mindfulness, helps us to manage the difficulties in a better way and develops our wisdom and compassion (Hanh, 2008, p. 9). Also, breathing is a practice of learning to pay attention to the sensations, without judging or labeling or wanting to change them. Therefore, the combined processes promote good conditions for recognizing the felt sense.

Other activities will include paying attention to sensations and feelings when the participant takes a shower, washes dishes, or walks. I predict that being more aware of movements and sensations when doing these activities will help each participant feel more relaxed and peaceful.

Making a pause to attend to the felt sense is another practice we regularly suggest that participants use during the week. In the pause, they will attend to what they are sensing, feeling, or thinking, from a certain distance, enabling them to realize that they are more than all those feelings and thoughts.

By the end of the psychotherapeutic process, a team project member will do a phenomenological interview to find out how the people *lived* their psychotherapy sessions. We want to know from their own perspective what was useful in making their lives feel more satisfying to them. In addition, we will do a phenomenological analysis of the psychotherapy sessions.

IN CONCLUSION

Crossing several theories or philosophies comes from living, from experiencing different situations, and from talking and listening carefully to people. In addition, *crossing* comes from sharing and experimenting with new ways of interacting amongst friends and trustworthy colleagues. Another path for crossing is doing something in a different way, to discover how it feels and what happens. Living and describing come first. Later, we share our lived experience, trying to understand each other. Only after that, we look for theoretical or conceptual ways of explaining.

For example: I pay attention to the movement of my belly while breathing. I pay attention to different parts of my body and become aware of how they feel (without giving it an explanation). I identify everything inside that prevents me from feeling well, and my attention is directed to the taste and texture of a strawberry that I eat. I realize how I am bodily feeling in the presence of another person. I live, describe, and share my lived experience. Only later I would ask: What am I doing? Am I engaged in Focusing or in Mindfulness?

If I take a pause to look at my thoughts from a distance I become aware that they *are* thoughts, and they are different from myself, from other people and things—is that action from Focusing, Mindfulness or MBCT? If I pay attention to what I see, hear, feel, taste, and sense in a non-judgmental way—is that Focusing, Mindfulness or MBCT?

At an experiential level it is not always easy to differentiate where each of these frames of reference begins and ends. They are mixed in a bodily way. Further, life situations are far too complex to describe and comprehend based on a single frame of reference. Different practices and theories help me understand, recognize and sense new nuances.

Focusing looks at human beings as *interactions* that *carry forward* an *implicit complexity* when they live from the *experiencing* (Gendlin, 1996, 2003, 2012).

Mindfulness emphasizes being with whatever is present, without judging, with acceptance and compassion (Kabat-Zinn, 1990/2010; Hanh, 2008).

MBCT points to the importance of negative thoughts in depression and suicidal intentions. Rather than fighting these negative thoughts, the process invites us to look at them in a mindful way, so “a person observes the active, ongoing process of thinking, rather than merely experiencing the world as structured through thought” (Luoma & Villate, p. 268). Some studies in MBCT have shown that “attempting to suppress intrusive thoughts tends to result in an increase in intensity and frequency of those very thoughts, as well as increases

in the intensity of negative emotions accompanying those thoughts” (Roemer & Borkovec, 1994; cited in Luoma & Villate, 2012, p. 270-271).

Crossing Focusing, Mindfulness and MBCT makes me feel enriched in my personal and professional life, generating new possibilities and a sense of wellbeing in everyday life, and with ever more resources to share with the people with whom I work. The process reassures my trust in living beyond words, theories and explanations, and opening to new discoveries.

As Najmanovich (2009) has pointed out, “The dimensions of bodily experiences cannot be ‘integrated’ in a single body of knowledge since these represent different ways of focusing on lived experiences” (p.6).

In the end, we all must answer the same questions, whether for our professional practice or for our own personal living. How am I to live? Do I attend to what I feel/think, or do I remain absorbed in my mental constructs? Do I attend to the present, or do I stay immersed in past memories or concerns about the future? Do I live within the interactive process of carrying my life forward, or do I live based on what I am supposed to do, disregarding my experiencing?

From my own felt experience, I know/feel/sense now that people are more than theories. I know that beyond theories, explanations and concepts, it is possible to live as a rich moving complexity that we cannot grasp or understand completely with any theory, concept, or word. Theories are partial, and provisional. In living, there are always new colors and facets, and that feels great.

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CROSSING FOCUSING AND NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Reflecting for Deeper Implications

F. Javier Romeo-Biedma, M.A.

ABSTRACT

Both Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication (NVC)* are based on the idea that people get insights and their inner processes get *carried forward* when some of their words are reflected. Reflection enhances connection both with oneself and with the companion. And reflection brings deeper implications, as implied aspects come into existence and become conscious.

However, Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* put the stress on reflecting different aspects of the original communication. Focusing follows felt senses in the body as a new way to create new meaning. *Nonviolent Communication* tries to find the universal *needs* that are at the core of every human action. Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* have been *crossed* in different ways (a short revision of some crossings is explored in this paper). Focusing can be enriched by introducing a new awareness for *needs*, especially when Asking. And *Nonviolent Communication* can be enhanced by a new sensitiveness to the original expressions of the person—not just trying to “translate” everything, but also valuing habitual language as metaphors.

When both processes are combined and the companion/therapist reflects aspects of both levels of awareness, the person achieves relevant results as deep implications emerge.

Keywords: Focusing, *Nonviolent Communication (NVC)*, Empathy, Reflect, Crossing.

TOWARD A MORE AUTHENTIC CONNECTION

When back in the beginning of 2009 I decided to open my own website, I started to look for a name that would convey what I was trying to do. I had been learning *Nonviolent Communication*, sharing it in practice groups and workshops and using it to accompany inner processes of other people since 2007. After weeks of trying various combinations—I did not know it then, but I was doing Focusing: looking for a handle—I found that my goal was bringing people *toward a More Authentic Connection*, so that was it. The name expressed clearly my conviction that there is always some kind of connection, and at the same time it conveyed the idea that we can always find a connection that is more authentic, both with our inner processes and with other people. By then I was satisfied with the quality of the connection I was able to create with others and with the depth of connection I could help to develop in people when accompanying their processes.

However, there was something missing. The so renowned *self-empathy*—the ability to stay with our inner processes in a way so that we find new steps—eluded me very often.

Although I could accompany others, sometimes I did not find the way to accompany my own inner processes, and I was frustrated about it. So I approached Focusing in June 2009 as the way to open and widen the path to self-empathy.

Focusing was the missing piece. With Focusing I discovered the bodily dimension—I was already comfortable with *feelings* and emotions, so I was gratefully surprised with the freshness and the movement that references to the body can bring to the whole inner world. With Focusing I also developed a richer confidence in the self-propulsion of processes, and completed my way of being fully present in silence or with minimal expression while accompanying. And with Focusing I thought about the use of language in order to create connection.

I could see from the start that both Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* worked on the assumption that reflection enhances connection with oneself and with the companion. In fact, saying back selectively what has been said can bring the speaker new insights. So, since the first trainings in Focusing, I was blending Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* in a way that seemed natural for me. When learning how to listen to a *felt sense*, I could not avoid thinking that there was a *need* somewhere underneath, and that “*Nonviolent Communication* awareness” helped me to stay connected with the process. And vice versa, while guiding somebody through a *Nonviolent Communication* process, I developed a new “Focusing attitude” toward whatever was alive, being aware that the harshest of expressions was not just “*a sentence to be translated*” but “*a handle that did not fit well—yet*”.

The path of Focusing proved itself rich and fruitful, and in 2012 I became a Certified Focusing Professional. Although during my training I learned to do Focusing on its own, when I teach either of the approaches, I always recommend the other. Moreover, when accompanying people in their inner processes, I offer and use both—as well as other therapeutic tools—organically, letting my own *felt senses* guide the decisions of when and to what degree to use each process.

FOCUSING AND NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION: A COMMON GROUND...

Both Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* share a Humanistic approach, so from the start I found that crossing both was supported by a common ground. Eugene Gendlin studied with Carl Rogers, obtained his doctorate, and both men continued a fruitful professional collaboration for over a decade. Eventually, Gendlin’s research took him to a related but autonomous path, one that included Focusing, Thinking At the Edge (TAE) and the Philosophy of the Implicit.

Marshall B. Rosenberg obtained his doctorate in Psychology and continued his training from a Humanistic approach that finally culminated in the creation of a process he called *Nonviolent Communication*. His quest for a deeper understanding of human processes and relationships led him to learn Focusing. As a result, Rosenberg incorporated parts of Focusing in his practice, and recommended it in his advanced trainings.

Much has been written about the Humanistic roots of Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication*. For me the starting point in wanting to cross them was the fact that both approaches share the three main conditions of Rogerian psychology. In order to compare the similarities, throughout this article we will use the word “Listener” to identify the person

that listens in either Focusing or *Nonviolent Communication*, be it a therapist, a guide, a companion or even the person when listening to an inner process (Cornell, 2005; 2013). “Listened To” will be used to name the person—or even an inner part or partial self—that is accompanied in the process. From a Humanistic point of view, both Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* rely on a confidence that the person has enough inner resources to overcome whatever occurs when he or she is provided with a relationship that is based in *unconditional positive regard* (“Every person is intrinsically good and deserves appreciation in him or herself”), congruence-authenticity (“A way can be found to express whatever is alive”) and empathy (“The Listener can understand the inner experience of the Listened To as if he or she was the other person or the inner process, but without leaving his or her own awareness”). However, both approaches go a step further: Focusing originated when Gendlin et al. (1968) discovered that the client who starts therapy with a low score in the Experiencing Scale (Klein et al., 1969) progresses only half a stage on this Scale. Therefore Gendlin developed the six steps of Focusing to provide low-scoring clients with specific help to raise their experiential level in order to make their therapy more effective. *Nonviolent Communication* also shares the goal of bringing the person to a deeper level (the level of universal human *needs*).

Another aspect that I followed to cross Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* was the awareness that two features define the work that is done in both approaches. Although these ideas are implied in all the teachings of both approaches, we will follow the formulation by Belgrave (2001). First, *attention* is directed to the *present*. The Listened To may explore past, future or possible situations as long as he or she stays grounded in the present experience, as in “*When I remember that event, I feel (now)...*” or “*When I imagine that that may happen, I feel (now)...*” One of the main tasks of the Listener is helping the Listened To to keep referring to his or her own present experience. And the second feature is the shared *intention* to create a *more authentic connection*. The process or processes of the Listened To are invited to be just as they are—with no change intended. “*Good*” intentions—alleviating suffering, releasing blocks, facilitating change—that do not take into account and acknowledge the deep implications of unpleasant experiences may very often stop the processes the Listener wants to help. Precisely for this reason, the intention of both approaches is usually worded as “*Staying with whatever that is and getting to know it better in its own timing*”.

My starting point to cross Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* was that the way to create and maintain the connection with the Listened To (be it a person or an inner process) is, in both approaches, to reflect, that is, to say back what has been said. It is assumed that selective reflection is enough to accompany the person to *carry forward* the inner process. However, what is reflected (and how) is different in each approach, as we will soon see.

I found many other common characteristics. I want to highlight a final one: both Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* are structured in “*steps*” for the sake of learning, and at the same time, they are much more than their steps. These “*steps*” are a “*map*”, a guide to a common human territory that is far bigger and more intricate than the “*components*”. Thus, Focusers are encouraged to develop a so-called “*Focusing attitude*” that goes beyond the six steps, and *Nonviolent Communication* practitioners are expected to rise to a “*Nonviolent Communication awareness*” that reaches further than its four steps. We will see that this “*attitude*” and this “*awareness*” are what will enable the crossing of Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication*.

... AND SOME DIFFERENCES

Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* are different approaches, so, of course, there are many differences between them. They both require systematic training and practice in order to develop and master some innate—but usually unrecognized—abilities that are summarized as “*empathy*”. In this article we will explore a subset of these abilities, namely the competence of the Listener to reflect—to say back—in order to generate deeper implications. However, there are some differences that I found necessary to keep in mind.

Focusing	<i>Nonviolent Communication</i>
<p>Objective: The Listened To lets form and identifies an intricate bodily feeling, the <i>felt sense</i>.</p>	<p>Objective: The Listened To is accompanied to recognize and acknowledge the underlying met or unmet <i>needs</i>.</p>
<p>Consequences: The <i>felt sense</i>, when given a space, carries forward the process to its fulfillment, the full development of its <i>implying</i>.</p>	<p>Consequences: The Listened To experiences a sense of relief, as identifying the core <i>needs</i> provides a very much needed acknowledgment (it is said that “<i>Needs need more acknowledgment than fulfillment</i>”) and an openness to consider new alternative <i>strategies</i>.</p>
<p>Reflection: Saying back as precisely as possible what the Listened To is saying, selectively choosing words related to inner processes with a bodily component.</p>	<p>Reflection: Translating what the Listened To says into a <i>needs</i> language, deliberately rephrasing sentences to <i>Observations-Feelings-Needs-Requests</i>.</p>
<p>Responsibility of the Listened To: Checking the reflection with the inner bodily experience (Resonating).</p>	<p>Responsibility of the Listened To: Checking the reflection with the inner experience (verifying whether the words, especially the <i>needs</i>, convey the inner process).</p>
<p>Precondition: The person Listened To is able to stay with his or her inner processes and relate to them with interested curiosity (Cornell, 2005; 2013).</p>	<p>Precondition: The person Listened To is willing to explore new wordings, letting go of the original expressions and the initial <i>strategies</i>.</p>

Table of some key differences between Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication*.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO *NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION*

Nonviolent Communication is the tool developed by Rosenberg to create a level of personal connection (interpersonal connection, but also connection of the person with his or her inner processes) that facilitates a pacific resolution of conflicts. He was interested in understanding why some people can respond with compassion to other beings, while other people are not able to find that compassion in themselves. He discovered that a big part of the problem lies in the fact that most of the cultures we know are based in judgments, labeling and “*power over*” instead of “*power with*”. From his roots in Humanistic Psychology, and with research in different cultural traditions, he structured a process in four steps that he called *Nonviolent Communication* (to honor its roots in the movements of Non-Violence) and also *Compassionate Communication*. The purpose of *Nonviolent Communication* is achieving an authentic expression as well as an empathic listening, with the objective of taking into account all the *needs* that are alive, and from there finding *strategies* that serve all the people affected (or all the inner parts of a person, in an inner conflict). The basic steps are:

- *Observation*. The aim is to discover and specify exactly what has been the trigger of the inner reaction. The main difficulty is differentiating *observations* from judgments and evaluations—which have a value in themselves when we realize that they are not *reality*, but *our interpretation of reality*. The sentence would then start as “*When I see/hear/think...*”
- *Feelings*. The challenge is finding “*pure*” *feelings*, (like “*joy*”, “*sadness*”, “*anger*”, “*uneasiness*”, “*despair*”...) instead of *feelings mixed with evaluations* (for example, “*abandoned*” expresses a *feeling* of sadness combined with an interpretation such as “*somebody should have been with me*”, that assigns blame to somebody). I have found that for people coming from a Focusing background, this distinction between “*pure*” and “*mixed*” feelings can be difficult, as the word *feeling* can convey different meanings. The subtle differentiations in *Nonviolent Communication* and Focusing between *feeling* (which is close to emotion), *sensation* (which can be physical, as in “*a constriction in my throat*” or symbolic, as in “*like a tube that is blocked*”) and *felt sense* are acquired through training. It is also important to note that while in Focusing a *feeling* mixed with an evaluation, as in “*abandoned*”, can effectively *carry forward* the process, in *Nonviolent Communication* arriving at a “*pure*” *feeling* is an important part of the process. A “*pure*” *feeling* is regarded as a handle for the inner movements. The sentence would then continue as “*...I feel...*”
- *Needs*. In *Nonviolent Communication* it is assumed that the origin of *feelings* is not in what happens outside, but in the inner *needs*. *Needs* (also expressed as *principles* or *values*) are the expression of aliveness—although they are not alive in the same proportion in every moment, or in every person. They are also universal to all human beings—they are not linked by definition to specific people or things. *Needs* are to be differentiated from *strategies*, the practical ways of meeting those *needs*. For example, all human beings have a *need* for “*connection*”; however there are many different *strategies* of meeting that *need*: in some moments we need some time alone to reconnect with ourselves, in others we create connection with an intimate conversation with a friend, or we have family dinner, or we organize a party, or we attend

a cultural event—the number of people involved and the quality of “*connection*” is different in each *strategy*, but it is somehow the same *need*. The sentence would go on as “...because my need for X is met / is not met...”

- *Request. Nonviolent Communication* is a process oriented to action. When the person arrives at deeper *needs*, new and inclusive *strategies*—*strategies* that take into account all the *needs* that are alive in all the parts and people involved—arise naturally. *Nonviolent Communication* proposes a way to build jointly *requests* that are precise, realistic, affirmative and negotiable—so they are truly *requests* and not *demands* (that is, trying to motivate, even if it is done subtly and apparently with respect, out of fear, guilt, shame or obligation, rather than out of willingness and genuine giving). The sentence would end as “...and I ask you/myself/them...”

A very simplified example of a process would be sitting with a sentence, such as, “*My job cuts my wings. I am just writing reports that nobody reads!*” until the deeper meaning of the sentence is unveiled as, “*When I see that I have been doing reports for the last nine months* (observation: external reality) *and I think that nobody reads them* (observation: the thought belongs to the internal reality of the person) *I feel discouraged and sad* (feelings) *because my needs for meaning, growth and contribution are not met* (needs) *and I ask myself to ask for a meeting with my boss next week to see how to improve this situation* (request: it is still a very general request, it would take a more precise form staying longer with the process)”.

Obviously, this is a summary of a much richer process that includes many reflections – saying back and forth translated versions of what is said, until all parts are satisfied that they have been heard and understood. Interested readers can explore *Nonviolent Communication* starting with the introductory books by Rosenberg (2003) and by Thomas d’Ansembourg (2001) and investigating the resources available online in the website of the *Center for Nonviolent Communication* (www.cnvc.org).

A QUICK OVERVIEW OF CROSSINGS OF FOCUSING AND NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

When I first encountered Focusing, it became clear that the closeness in perspective and the complementary approaches would bring a natural interest in crossing Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* to many people from both fields. I found that *Nonviolent Communication* trainers and practitioners were recommending Focusing in their trainings, and in Focusing trainings there was usually somebody who had heard about *Nonviolent Communication*. I started to investigate, and I was happily surprised to discover that so many had combined both models in different ways already. I offer a quick overview that is intended to reveal the richness and variety of possibilities, as long as it is accepted that what I am presenting is just a glimpse of the actual work done by probably hundreds of individuals worldwide, evident, for example, in the existence of an “NVC & Focusing Google Group” (<http://groups.google.com/group/nvcf>) with over 140 members—and that is just one English speaking group. That said, the following enumeration will be partial, and by no means exhaustive. For the sake of clear representation, and to ensure that each technique is soundly transmitted, only professionals that have been certified in either or both approaches will be mentioned. However, it must be kept in mind that there are many other individuals

combining these two models in their personal lives and in their professional practices in ways as enriching as the ones mentioned here.

First of all, for me it was very encouraging to discover that there are several trainers certified both in Focusing (by The Focusing Institute) and in *Nonviolent Communication* (by the *Center for Nonviolent Communication*), for example: Gina Cenciose (Canada), Shulamit Day Berlevtov (Canada), Elizabeth English *Locana* (UK), Peter Kuklis (Slovakia and UK) and Allan Rohlfs (USA).

There are also Certified Focusing Trainers with a strong background and teaching practice in *Nonviolent Communication*, who explicitly use both approaches. Among others I can mention are: Beatrice Blake (USA and El Salvador), Leona Dawson (Australia), Yara Gabriela Jiménez (El Salvador), Melba Jiménez (El Salvador) and Solange St-Pierre (Canada, specialized in the practice of Restorative Circles, an application of *Nonviolent Communication* in community settings), and the author of this article, F. Javier Romeo-Biedma (Spain).

I have also found that there are many *Nonviolent Communication* Trainers that have been certified by the *Center for Nonviolent Communication* who use Focusing or bodily practices closely related to Focusing. However, for a long time, there has been a strong request from the *Center for Nonviolent Communication* about not combining the use of *Nonviolent Communication* with other techniques in their trainings, so that clarity about the technique is maintained, and that consideration makes it more difficult to identify trainers that use both. Among the trainers that explicitly employ Focusing are Lynd Morris (USA) and Gabriele Lindemann (Germany). However, there are many other trainers that use some sort of “Focusing awareness”, as for example, *Nonviolent Communication* founder Rosenberg (USA), who was trained in Focusing and uses the process to accompany personal processes in combination with *Nonviolent Communication*; and trainers like Robert Gonzales (USA) and Susan Skye (USA), who have developed a process called “*Transforming the Pain of Unmet Needs into the Beauty of the Needs*” that resembles Focusing; Bridget Belgrave (UK) and Gina Lawrie (UK), who have created the “*NVC Dance Floors*” with dynamics that bring the body into the process; Inbal Kashtan (USA) and Miki Kashtan (USA), who offer several exercises that consist in “*giving bodily empathy (in silence)*”; and many others.

Finally, although the amount of written materials about crossing Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* is not proportional to the work done by so many people, there are some interesting references (Blake, 2010; Blake and Rice, 2007; Day Berlevtov, 2010; Rice, 2008), and many others in personal or professional websites and blogs. Readers interested in this issue are invited to explore further to discover many other practitioners of crossings of both approaches.

BRINGING A “FOCUSING ATTITUDE” TO THE NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

Nonviolent Communication works with the idea that some wordings allow a better connection—with oneself and with other people—than others. However, the point of *Nonviolent Communication* is not *translating* every sentence into the *Observation-Feelings-Needs-Request* model, but rather, identifying the core *needs* that unite all human beings and empathizing from that kind of connection. I discovered that Focusing training

improves *Nonviolent Communication* practice with a deeper consideration for the expressions used—be they judgments, evaluations, *feelings* mixed with interpretations, *strategies* misunderstood as *needs*... Holding the idea that an expression is a symbol, although maybe one that may not fit well, brings a new openness toward what is being expressed. Thus, the reflection and the search for a better expression for me has more to do with finding a handle that captures the situation more adequately than with “*correcting*” the expression. This “Focusing attitude” enriches the process with a welcoming way of listening and with the motivation to find *needs* out of the words that *already imply them*.

The idea of staying with a process in its own timing is not new in *Nonviolent Communication*. However, I have developed a deeper confidence in inner processes through the Focusing concept and experience of *implicit intricacy*. Being aware that there is always something more that waits to be listened to and symbolized has provided me with a form for staying with whatever appears in a calmer, more respectful way.

I have seen that the whole process of Focusing comes naturally to many advanced practitioners of *Nonviolent Communication*, and sometimes they even express that they were already doing some kind of Focusing. On the other hand, people who are beginning to learn *Nonviolent Communication* benefit especially from the bodily awareness that Focusing brings to *feelings*, emotions, and sensations.

Finally, Focusing has helped me to become deeply and quickly aware of my own *felt senses* while I am accompanying somebody else. I have learned to recognize and acknowledge whatever appears in me in a way that allows me to continue accompanying the process while being genuine to myself. Focusing enriches the practice of *Nonviolent Communication* in many other ways, but for the scope of this article these outlines will suffice.

BRINGING A “NON VIOLENT COMMUNICATION AWARENESS” TO THE FOCUSING PRACTICE

In my experience, I have found that the Focusing practice can be enhanced by several considerations of *Nonviolent Communication*. We will explore two of them: first, the “*Nonviolent Communication awareness*” and second, the use of *Nonviolent Communication* when Asking.

To begin, I have experienced that having the framework of *needs* as the core motivation for all human processes helps the Listener to be aware that under every expression, emotion, symbol, or feeling...there is at least one universal human need. This awareness supports the Listener in being more present, trying to sense how it feels to have that underlying *need*. So, for example, when we hear that “*something tight*” appears, we want to be open to what that is all about, *without necessarily saying anything aloud*. ‘*Is that “something tight” related to a need for safety, for “wanting to be sure that something is under control”?* Or does it have to do more with the opposite, that “*something tight*” is experienced as a barrier to the fulfillment of the needs of freedom, self-expression or spontaneity?’ Maybe the process continues in a way that we had not foreseen (for example, that “*something tight*” may be expressing a *need* for support and companionship, or for harmony and peace), and nevertheless in some way our attitude of listening to the *needs* has helped the Listened To and the Listener to be open to deeper implications at the level of the *needs*.

On the other hand, *Nonviolent Communication* techniques can be used explicitly, especially when Asking. Although it is generally accepted that questions in Focusing are to be used in a measured way, there are processes that are helped by asking or making a suggestion directly to the *felt sense*. While the usual way of listening includes reflecting as precisely as possible, questions are risky because they offer an expression *that does not exist yet in the Listened To*, they are just deduced or supposed by the Listener. In the practice that I propose, the question is a sentence offered to the Listened To with the intention of *carrying forward* the process one step more, trying to make *explicit* what is *implicit* or what is *implied* in the process. The Listened To is invited to check inwardly, to see if something resonates with the sentence, and if it does, then to follow its implications if the sentence serves the process, or to reject it if it does not fit. *Nonviolent Communication* can be a source for creating questions because it provides a framework—namely, universal human *needs*—to reword the discourse of the Listened To, in the following ways. For example:

- The easiest question, already proposed in all Focusing materials is “*What does it need?*” Although the ideal is that this question brings into awareness a core universal *need*, it can instead bring a *strategy* (a concrete way of fulfilling the underlying *needs*, that is linked to the circumstances) and even so *carry forward* the process.
- A more elaborate question that I adopt directly from *Nonviolent Communication* can take the form of guessing and asking for the underlying *needs*, like “*Are you needing support/care/space/meaning...?*”. In my experience, the Listened To checks inwardly, and then three main possibilities arise: 1) if there is a fit, an expression like “*Yes, that is it, I am needing support. I want to be helped and sustained*” can appear; 2) the question does not fit the experience, but brings a deeper awareness at the *needs* level that *carries forward* the process, for example, “*No, it is not support. I am needing reciprocity. I want to be taken care of as I take care of others*”; or 3) the feeling does not suit the process and can be discarded, as in, “*No, it is more like a knot of gray metal wires...*”.
- In *Nonviolent Communication feelings* are considered indicators of *needs* that are alive and that require close listening. When *feelings* appear in a Focusing process, I have found that *Nonviolent Communication* rephrasing can be very useful to uncover unmet *needs*, as in “*Maybe you are feeling vulnerable because your need for safety is not met?*” or “*You may want to check if that sadness has to do in some way with your need for meaning and connection*”. As we saw before, the guess may fit or not; however I have frequently observed that it can somehow move the process to a deeper level.
- Handles and *needs* can be linked and explored together—but only when the process is advanced and the Listened To is fully connected to the process. For example, in “*So there is that blue stick that has to do with making that activity enjoyable, and maybe you are needing playfulness and enjoyment?*” or in “*There is that unmet need for autonomy and self-expression that is like a dark fist clutching your throat, does that sound right?*” And the guess is verified with the inner experience.

Of course, in order to Ask, it is necessary to be in disposition of receiving whatever comes, whether the new information is what we were expecting (the *needs* we guessed, or at least other *needs*) or not (an entirely new image or emotion appears). For me it is very important that the Listener keeps in mind that these questions are just other handles suggested to

the Listened To, and if they do not fit, the process can be *carried forward* just by listening to it a little bit more.

Apart from the advantages for the Listener of having in mind universal *needs*, in my experience *Nonviolent Communication* helps the Listened To deal with stoppages. I have found *Nonviolent Communication* especially useful when the inexperienced Focuser starts to get nervous at a certain point and wants some way to release a block. A language of *needs*, that combines language and discourse with inner awareness, allows the Focuser to “*come to the surface of discursive language to take a breath and be able to go deeper in symbolic language*”.

WHAT CAN A COMBINED PROCESS LOOK LIKE

A process that combines Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication* can take very different forms, but it will always include the “Focusing attitude” and the “*Nonviolent Communication* awareness” mentioned before. We will examine a part of a process that I followed in order to write this article, with **F** to comment on Focusing aspects and **NVC** to comment on *Nonviolent Communication* considerations. Although I was accompanied, and I am grateful for the support throughout the session, I was intentionally leading this part of the process, with minimal reflection by my companion at my request.

<i>I would like to know how it feels in my body all about writing the article...</i>	Start with F .
<i>Hmm...There is something there...It is like a crystal...in front of my stomach... It is kind of translucent, not completely transparent...And it is soft...Not soft, no, more like not completely hard, with rounded edges...</i>	F process of finding a <i>felt sense</i> , finding a handle and resonating.
<i>It has something to do with clarity...</i>	Still an F insight, the whole meaning of the word “ <i>clarity</i> ” yet unclear.
<i>Maybe I want to have clarity about what I want to transmit in the article...</i>	NVC guess, exploring “ <i>clarity</i> ” as a <i>need</i> .
<i>No, it is not about having clarity myself... but about providing clarity... I want to bring clarity about how each process works and how they can be combined...</i>	NVC process, exploring the aspects of the <i>need</i> for clarity.
<i>Yes! And I want to give clarity because I want to contribute, I want to make meaningful remarks about both processes! Aha! (Physical movement and deep breath).</i>	An initial NVC <i>need</i> for “ <i>clarity</i> ” brings two deeper <i>needs</i> , of “ <i>contribution</i> ” and “ <i>meaningfulness</i> ”.

<p><i>And I can see that the crystal is kind of shining upward and downward...</i></p>	<p>After the <i>NVC</i> insight provides relief, the F aspect steps forward again with more symbolizing.</p>
<p><i>The light shining upward has to do with “uniqueness”...with realizing that every process is unique...and I want people to see that...Yes...</i></p>	<p>F continues with more symbolizing, that brings new <i>NVC needs</i> of “<i>consideration</i>”, of “<i>care</i>”, of “<i>valuing each process as unique</i>”.</p>
<p><i>And the light shining downward has to do with “universality”...with acknowledging that under every process there are universal needs that unite us as human beings...Hmm...</i></p>	<p>And more symbolizing from the F process that brings new <i>NVC needs</i> of “<i>awareness</i>”, of “<i>connection</i>”, of “<i>interdependence</i>”.</p>
<p><i>So that is what this crystal is about...It is about clarity, it has to do with contribution and meaning, and it wants me to bring clarity about the uniqueness of each process and at the same time about the universality of underlying human needs. Yes! Hmm...And I am sensing that something new appears...</i></p>	<p>This part of the process is summarized and resonated with both F and <i>NVC</i>, and the process goes on.</p>

A FINAL REFLECTION ON REFLECTION

In this article we have explored how I have experienced the crossing of Focusing and *Nonviolent Communication*. Since the beginning, crossing both approaches has been natural, logical, and organic. We have seen how I started from some theoretical aspects that are common to and that differentiate both approaches. Then we have reviewed a bit of the history of crossings, a fact that encouraged me to find my own way of crossing them. We have examined instances in my practice that show how each approach can enrich the other. Finally, we have observed in detail what a combined process can look like.

As a conclusion, I want to stress that both in Focusing and in *Nonviolent Communication* we reflect in order to create a deeper connection: a deeper connection of the Listener with the Listened To (what is usually called “empathy”), but even more important, a deeper connection of the Listened To with his or her inner processes. Focusing invites us, among many other things, to appreciate the uniqueness of every human process, to enhance its originality and to follow its inner knowledge, because whatever is implied can become explicit with enough listening and care. Hence, the Listener is in a position of humility and awe, with a profound respect toward every expression that the Listened To uses, reflecting back the words as something precious and yet not completely unfolded. *Nonviolent Communication* guides us to see that under every human expression there are underlying universal human needs. This process fosters a sensation of interdependence and connection with all human

beings, and a confidence that we can connect with the motivation of every human being, even when we disagree with the *strategies* chosen to meet those *needs*. Also facilitated is the creation of an inner space where the *needs* that are alive can be acknowledged, and where *strategies* can be considered from a new perspective that includes as many *needs* as possible. Having both considerations in our consciousness will make us more respectful toward the life that is expressed in the words and gestures of the Listened To, and at the same time more attentive to our common human nature. Let us continue working to find deeper implications by listening and saying back from the crossing of these perspectives—and from many more.

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ECO-FOCUSING: Nature as an Echo to Human Nature

Ronit Schwartz

Rebecca is 84 years old. She has dementia and Parkinson's disease. Rebecca and I go outside and stand on the porch. I ask her how she is. She doesn't answer. I see her rest her hand on her chest. I tell her that I see her hand and I wonder what's there. She doesn't answer. I can see signs of Focusing, and I invite her to feel, to be, with her chest. We begin to walk. I encourage her to walk with her feeling, her sense. She walks slowly, at her own pace. No faster, no slower. Words are not spoken, but I have a sense that they are present, accompanying us in their own way. I don't know where we're going. I am not leading. I look at nature and I look at Rebecca. Nature, like the unspoken words, accompanies us, bringing its own perspective: a support, an anchor, something to fall back on. I am not alone with Rebecca. I am with her and with nature and with them both. Together we are on a journey in Focusing in nature and in human nature. Turning to Rebecca, I touch her chest and ask her curiously, gently, "What's here? Why did you rest your hand here?" I am the one who initiates, the only one who speaks. There are no words from Rebecca, only silence. With nature as my partner, I have strength, I have interest, I have belief. Rebecca stands next to a stone under a pecan tree. At first glimpse, the stone looks like nothing important, with no particular shape or color. I echo her stop—this stop is part of her Focusing. I invite her to Focus by asking her what it is about the stone and her chest, her chest and the stone. Her body changes. Something new has arrived; it looks like excitement. Nature and I are both with her, echoing her, together and as individuals. We each come from our own perspective, without words, but with great presence and acceptance, allowing the process to be alive and dynamic. Then, words break through—lyrics to a well-known song—and I repeat them: "It's not the same home, it's not the same as it was." Rebecca says, "I haven't felt emotion like that in a long time...I love to feel moved like that." She strokes the stone. We are together with the stone without words, and with words and with so much beyond the scope of what can be known. She has created a Focusing journey for herself, through her sense and through the stone, a journey within a journey, nature in human-nature. Nature and I are with her, so she chooses. In this moment of grace, in this moment in her life, we both allow her to be and to be not. She tells me about the stone; it was the stone her beloved son, who had passed away, had visited often as a child. I ask her how her chest feels and rest my own hand there. She answers, "It's like a smile."

Rebecca worked through a felt sense, and through our journey the felt sense changed shape, color, and meaning for her. We completed our journey in a new space—a smile. I call this "Focusing metabolism".

Eco-Focusing is Focusing that takes place outdoors, in nature, in an echoing environment. In an echoing environment, what you emit is reflected back to you by your environment. This echo is an opportunity to re-experience and refine your felt sense by meeting with it a new way. Many such echoing environments exist, including art and music, but the

echoing environment I choose to work with is nature. The combination of the words ecology and Focusing describe the influences on the experience of the person. Ecology is defined as a branch of science that deals with the relationship of organisms to one another and to their natural surroundings. The experience achieved in Eco-Focusing, of nature echoing and connecting with us, acts as an anchor for our felt sense. Eco-Focusing allows the Focusing process to go from a defined space to open spaces. We can move through the spaces of nature, Focusing, and Eco-Focusing in a way that fits our specific needs from the process. At the same time, we can easily connect with our inner-eco, our felt senses, notice them and tend to them.

The integration of ecology and Focusing is the result of my personal and professional experiences. Professionally, I trained in nature-therapy for years before ever learning about Focusing. Dr. Ronen Berger (2013), a founder of nature-therapy methodology, offers an illustrative description of the process on The Nature Therapy Center's website:

Nature Therapy is an innovative therapeutic framework that takes place through the direct and creative dialogue humans have with nature. It expands the classical concept of 'setting' while developing concepts and methods that place in nature as a partner in the therapeutic process. It connects people with their strength, supports change and healing while expanding the therapeutic process and actively engaging humans with nature.

My work with nature and in nature exposed me to its unique qualities in creating connections and context, its characteristic liveliness, and its important role in human life and experience. This is its power to create change. The availability and accessibility of nature can awaken all senses at once, and the infinite variety that exists in nature encourages a wide range of emotional experiences that allow humans to connect with their inner-beings, feelings, felt-senses.

Returning home from a four-month trip with my family to South America, where I had countless meaningful, authentic encounters with nature, I was infused with the desire to continue my studies of *experiential being*. I wanted to verify what was going on inside me, and to give it deepened meaning. This is how I began to practice Focusing.

While studying Focusing, I found nature to be a key element and an active partner in my Focusing process. I was curious about the integration of the two fields, and began making connections in my professional life. I continue to research, through nature, finding new paths of thought, working from the hidden to the apparent, from the apparent to the hidden. I research and learn through the edges of leaves, the shadows of trees, through raindrops, through my interactions with nature, and nature's interactions within itself. I learn through change and through happenings, and most importantly through the meeting of my felt senses with nature—a meeting which supports me and my research, supports the life of Eco-Focusing and fills it with meaning.

What I have discovered I am serving up here, fresh from nature itself. There are many other things that I feel I know but cannot yet express in words, and so I leave them. For now, I leave them be.

ECO-FOCUSING AND THE FOCUSER

For most people, the qualities of Eco-Focusing make the Focusing process more alive and available. This is particularly important for people with cognitive “disconnects”, like people with dementia, ADD, or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) for whom connections between body and senses are not readily available. The “felt-nature” allows people with such disconnects, as well as others, to connect with their felt senses in a way that bypasses the cognitive processes not easily accessible to them.

Felt-nature is an expression that speaks to the unique qualities of Eco-Focusing. Firstly, when we enter into or exit from nature, a felt sense can be achieved effortlessly. The concrete manifestation of a felt sense in nature, echoing our human nature, allows the felt sense to surface without words. Another quality of nature is its presence—nature has infinite dynamic presence. The Focuser, in many ways, has control over his or her echo in nature—through the pace, the intensity, and the use of other senses like touch.

Nature also exhibits deep acceptance—nature accepts each of us exactly as we are; it has no expectations of us, does not judge, does not conform to social norms. Moreover, nature is precise and refined. As in Focusing, Eco-Focusing allows you to be protected and let go at the same time. In addition, nature arouses curiosity—an essential element in the process of Focusing. Curiosity creates an authentic dedication to the movement of self that is so important in deepening the process of Focusing.

An additional quality of Eco-Focusing relates to the question of how nature interacts and converses with a person who has “lost his words”. This quality is one that I’ve noticed often when working with troubled youth and individuals with dementia. The idea of “lost his words” reflects an inability to verbalize properly, perhaps as a result of trauma or neurological damage. Both in Focusing and in nature, the a-verbal is a precursor to the verbal, and one needs to be able to stay in that moment. Nature allows this beautiful stay. The body can be without words. There is something enabling about this word-free part of the process, something supportive and legitimizing in letting the body stay in that space. In this way, Eco-Focusing allows people who cannot (or will not) connect with their felt senses using traditionally cognitive processes (such as speech) to focus.

When I first met Daniel, an abused teenager, he had so much anger in his body that he wanted to hit me, to pick up a stick and hit me. When I tried talking to him about connecting with his felt sense, his feelings of anger and aggression were only amplified. He felt that he could not understand, could not connect with anything he was feeling inside. We started walking in nature, without words. He had bodily movements that expressed aggression. I let them happen authentically, looking at them as a way to clear some space. I allowed them to be expressed by not confronting them with my words. After a few minutes, I begin asking all kinds of benign questions about his day-to-day life, how work is, what he’s doing tomorrow. He answers that he doesn’t know, he can’t decide, and he can’t live with that unknown. I echo, “Don’t know, can’t decide”. I ask him to look for his feeling, somewhere in nature, wherever he

wants, however he wants—look for the unknown, the indecisiveness. He starts walking, and I'm with him. He stops by a tree, and I ask him what it is about the tree that reflects his unknown. He answers, "There are so many branches, how can we know, when each branch goes off in a different direction." I ask him if he likes where he is standing or if he might like to move around. He decides to move closer, touches the tree trunk, touches the branches, and the tree stands as though its only purpose is to be there for him, accepting him and giving him the space he needs, being present and arousing curiosity. I ask him to show me where on the tree the unknown is—is it something in the touch, the size, the leaves, the branches, the directions? He chooses to touch a branch in the middle. I invite him to feel where this feeling is inside his body. He tells me it's like a string in his throat, and now begins to connect with his felt sense. When he cannot stay with his felt sense, he is with the branch. The felt sense is colored white, and when he touches the branch, he explains the sense as one of widening. I find myself Focusing on the tree, and I know that when I am less present in the Focusing process, the tree is there present, and nature is there present. He is not alone, and will not be alone. By the end of our time together, he could stay with the unknown, with the sense of widening. This was the first time he could feel not only with his thoughts, but also with his felt sense, allowing him to connect with the place inside that doesn't know and can't decide, and feel safe at the same time.

For this boy, the echo of nature as an unknown, indecisive space validated his not-knowing.

This story exemplifies for me what it is to be an Eco-Focusing practitioner—I don't tire, don't give in to anger or an inability of the Focuser to connect with his or her felt sense. I look at nature as a path that guides and supports us: trees that embrace us, smells that come and go; they move me; they fill me with optimism and strength and curiosity.

In Eco-Focusing, the element in nature that the person connects with represents the felt sense for them, at least until they can connect with that felt sense in their body. I can use nature to connect with the felt sense inside. In this way nature enables, and is sometimes even necessary, for Focusing to begin, as in the case of Daniel. In other instances, a felt-sense can become more tangible, easier to grasp, when its physical manifestation is found in nature. In this way, I can go from the inside out, as with Rebecca, who had a felt-sense and found its expression in nature.

ECO-FOCUSING AND THE FOCUSING PRACTITIONER

From defined space to open spaces—the widening of choices for the Focuser allows for the deepening of the process, but also allows the Focusing practitioner endless options for him or her self.

Nature itself is a Focusing enabler. As a Focusing practitioner in nature, I am more centered, more present and more accepting. Nature gives me strength and variety; it awakens

my curiosity and arouses my senses. Its qualities of aliveness, happiness and optimism help me feel alive and optimistic myself. In the communal space of all three parties—Focuser, Focusing practitioner and nature, I can make myself more precise.

In another sense, nature itself is a Focusing practitioner. It is three-dimensional, tangible, and alive. The elements in nature echo the elements in human nature giving nature great power in awakening the senses. You can feel it, be in it, be part of, or witness to, the changes that occur in it. Nature can be a partner, a background, a stage, a witness, a challenge. Nature supplies us with raw material to touch, to smell, to feel. Eco-Focusing integrates the felt-sense into the felt-nature.

The Focuser has the option of being echoed by either the Focusing practitioner or nature, or both. In some cases, Focusers need only nature's echo, and the role of the Focusing practitioner is merely to echo the Eco-Focusing between them. In other cases, nature is but a background and stage allowing the process of Focusing to come alive between Focuser and Focusing practitioner. There is a partnership between Focusing-practitioner and nature, between nature and Focuser, and between nature and Focusing in nature.

Working in nature opens doors to many surprising possibilities and connections. I can meander between eco, Focusing and Eco-Focusing, between space and open-space, using the unique qualities that characterize both nature and Focusing to achieve a deep and meaningful experience.

SPACES OF FELT SENSE

In Eco-Focusing, the process of Focusing is based in the body as a whole. The body entering nature—walking, moving, touching—allows for whole body Focusing. In one of my seminars, a participant noted that the most meaningful part for her was during the walk itself. There are people who might feel comfortable Focusing after climbing a tree, and others who want to dip their feet in the water of a stream. This vast world of choices allows the process of Focusing to be more exact, and allows the body to be more open to its felt senses.

In Eco-Focusing, the felt sense reflects an element in nature, or nature may reflect an element in human nature through a felt sense. This felt sense is unique in that it encompasses knowledge about nature and about human nature. Nature's unique characteristics allow interactions with the felt sense to be moving and full of life. For someone with dementia, this ability to connect with a felt sense allows him or her to experience and remember a process that has a beginning, middle, and end—a process that holds meaning. It allows the person the knowledge to understand that there are still new things to experience, things that can open doors to new feelings. Eco-Focusing is a way to facilitate people in their connection to nature, and to human-nature. For Rebecca, Focusing on her felt sense took her out into nature. She would have inevitably gone out for the purpose of the nature-therapy session, but the focus on her felt sense allowed her encounter with nature to be much more meaningful. In my opinion, nature opens options in the world of Focusing, no less than Focusing can help the process of nature-therapy, or other types of work in nature.

I go out into the woods with an 85 year old man. We walk, and as we walk, he is clearing away the pine needles around him with a stick. Entering the woods is like entering the Focusing process, and he soon begins to notice his shadow. I notice him noticing, and echo him, through my movements and through my words that describe what I see him doing. He begins to play with his shadow, making it bigger and smaller, walking with it, talking to it, laughing with it. I ask him if he can tell me where his shadow is inside his body. He points to the palm of his hand, and I ask him if he can stay with that spot. After a moment, he raises his hand as if to show the spot to the shadow. Once in a while, the movement of the sun and the trees make it hard for us to see the shadow on the ground, and sometimes it disappears. I ask him, "What is it, in that spot on your hand?" He answers, "The shadow of death." I echo him and stay there with him. Unlike his shadow, he is there. We continue to walk, shadow disappearing and reappearing alongside us, and I ask him about that spot. He says it's gone. Like the shadow, he doesn't feel it anymore.

One-moment-in-one-session. That dear man passed away shortly after.

Eco-Focusing connects principles from Focusing with principles from working in nature. In their connection, a new entity is created, a whole new field, one that is not the simple sum of the two fields. Eco-Focusing encompasses various methodologies that take place in an environment that echoes both Focuser and Focusing practitioner. In this environment, the person is given more options to connect with his or her felt senses, options for pace and echo and intensity. The Focusing process goes from an abstract internal process to one that has concrete manifestation in the outside world. Eco-Focusing takes us from what is static to what is alive and dynamic, and from a meeting of two people to a meeting of three: Focusers, Focusing practitioner, and nature. The unmediated movement through the space of nature, the space of felt sense and space created when the two interact, speaking to this fields' unique qualities.

Eco-Focusing has special meaning for me. I have personal issues with concentration and attention. When I'm sitting in a closed room, I'm constantly looking for what is beyond. In Eco-Focusing I can access my professional merits with ease, because of nature and because of Focusing. I can Focus precisely without disconnecting myself. Eco-Focusing is a space where my creative process of Focusing can come alive in a way that is both authentic and effortless. I still have many questions about Eco-Focusing, about characteristic qualities as well as the extremities of nature and human nature. Because of the dynamic aliveness of nature and felt sense, I am more curious and less knowledgeable with every question answered.

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HEALING HAPPENS FROM WITHIN: Crossing Two Modalities with Focusing

Michele Ferraro, Psy.D.

MY PRACTICE NEEDED CROSSINGS

Many of my clients experience extreme levels of pain and trauma. The Focusing attitude (Gendlin, 1996, p.55) correlated well with my philosophical tenets. I teach meditation classes and noticed the similarities. As my client roster became more pain/trauma based, I wondered what would happen if I wove Mindfulness, Body Scanning, and Focusing's Clearing a Space together for them. I became intrigued and identified some valuable similarities of these interventions.

- Gentle, person-centered practices that created an inner sense of safety
- Practices that allowed me to be in energetic connection with my clients

After implementing this combination, clients experienced a variety of positive outcomes including:

- A deeper sense of safety
- A willingness to identify and contemplate releasing pain and traumatic experiences
- An ability to identify felt senses, and an increased capacity to allow the emergence of new expanded meaning of the experiences, regardless of the complexity of the pain experience (visceral, spiritual, emotional, environmental, psychological)
- Experiencing how meanings implicit in the body (sometimes called “the unconscious”) powerfully describe in images, gestures, and words ways to move forward
- A desire to take proactive control of their lives, make informed healthcare decisions, and aspire to experience happiness, fun, and joy

CREATING NEW CROSSINGS

Mindfulness Meditation keeps one in the present, body scans relax, and Clearing a Space creates the connection to whole being (mind body spirit). This crossing of therapies provides a basis for a practice that clients create for themselves, begin to feel the benefits of, and then want to incorporate into their daily living. The Focusing practice includes Clearing a Space, imaging, felt sensing, releasing the hold of disturbing events by expanding meaning, and developing resources to move forward toward self-actualization. Ultimately, by using this combination of practices, a new, unique to the individual, practice emerges that is fluid and life altering.

My initial Focusing experience was prescient and flowed symbiotically with already established daily meditation and Reiki practices. I incorporated Focusing as another practice

for mind body spirit wholeness. I especially enjoyed the rich and gentle features of Focusing beginning with nonjudgmental listening. In a clinical setting it is sensed as an act of kindness, which establishes a safety zone. An interaction occurs that creates change. It is immediate, palpable, and documentable.

When I was eleven, my mother was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease; she was 38. Her dear friend taught her meditation and yoga asanas; the asanas fell by the wayside as her balance became an issue, but the meditation continued until she passed at 49. By the time I was 15, meditation was part of my daily life, because I felt better when I did it, and no matter what chaos surrounded daily living, for those minutes (being exactly in the present with NO JUDGMENT OR EXPECTATIONS) I felt safe and peaceful—all of my troubles seemed to slip away. I wanted that for my patients. My Nonna always said, "*When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.*" Meditation is like lemonade, and I love to share it.

Early in my career, a colleague suffered through an unanticipated medical leave. Overnight, my caseload increased to nine or ten patients a day. I was overwhelmed. And yet, it was fortuitous when K. (one of the former colleague's clients) entered the therapy room, and I was forced to deal with my reciprocal anxiety. In addition to her extreme issues, she was overcome with fear and anxiety because a stranger with only a chart and file was sitting across from her. It had taken months for her to feel safe enough to disclose some of her overwhelming pain and tragedy to her therapist; suddenly she was thrown into an uncomfortable situation of beginning anew. She could barely speak and when she did the speech was circumstantial—hardly comprehensible. Her distress was palpable, and I noticed my increased heart rate, shortness of breath, feelings of despair, and hopelessness. I was a physical, mental, and spiritual wreck when she left. The worst of it was that I had no idea what was wrong with her, and the prior progress notes were illegible. She was scheduled back in two days. With an already overloaded patient roster, I could not schedule a consultation before her next appointment.

My intense physical response was code for *I need a plan!* I could hardly sleep, consumed with worry about how I would be with K. At the time, I was teaching a meditation practice, and was therefore familiar with the benefits of mindfulness breathing. As a Focuser, I experienced relief with Clearing a Space and observed how just that piece of Focusing allows a modicum of relief to occur. I reflected on my personal journey with debilitating physical pain and my extraordinary healing with Focusing, thanks to Doralee Grindler Katonah (who conducted the experiential program at the university I attended). I "Focused" with my partner and alone, but at that time (not so different than now) the issues that needed my attention were external (classes, practicum, work, family, finances...). One night, in bed, surrounded by books, laptop, files of student papers requiring grading, I was experiencing a lot of physical pain. In this midst of chaos, I sensed the word *Focus*. I began to Clear a Space, an image emerged: a posse of gunslingers guns blazing. What? I sat with that for a while...an image of me as a small child sitting on my Dad's lap watching Gunsmoke on television. *Sometimes you have to bring out all the guns to scare away the bad guys.* I placed the pain on the dresser. I sensed the need for sleep and meditation. It really was an inner wisdom—a knowing. That was the beginning of combining modalities for me.

When I greeted K. in the reception area a few days later, I could sense her containment of fear and frustration. She stared at me deeply; I felt her in my heart. I said, "It seems as though you have so many things you want to tell me and just don't know where to start, and

you don't even know if you can trust me with it all. Let's just relax for a few moments before we begin." My heart was racing; knowing I needed to calm down at least as much as she did, I pulled my chair up so our knees were almost touching. I knew she wouldn't be able to close her eyes—not yet trusting me, but she did follow my cues, and we were able to breathe together. I sensed that if I could guide her to notice her breathing and then count her breaths, she would calm a bit. When I noticed her body begin to relax, mine did as well. I did a quick body scan with her, allowing us to acknowledge the places in her body that were tight, tense, and painful. Our eyes never lost contact. She told me I had a soothing voice and began to cry.

"No one listens to me," she claimed hesitantly. My eyes teared up, too, and I felt a heaviness in my chest.

"It hurts in here," I whispered, (putting my hand on my chest). "It is so heavy." She nodded. We both sighed. And our relationship began. An empathic connection is part of being human; perhaps connection is an interaction that carries forward the client's implicit intricacy, as Gendlin (1998) would describe it.

The breathing was an icebreaker of sorts. It eased anxiety and fear for both of us. But also it created a sense of safety for her and intimacy between us. When I moved into the body scan, I also mentioned that in the room judgment and expectation did not exist. I could feel myself relaxing more; I knew how to proceed. We would just allow what would come to come and be in the present. Nothing from the past would interfere, and the future was yet to come. I was there with her. The playing field changed, at least for that minute. Each of us sensed an energetic connection.

I guided K. through Clearing a Space—so many enmeshed issues appeared. Each issue seemed to her so big and entangled with other issues. Together, we just observed each one with friendly curiosity, at a distance. And then, it was time to end the session; too soon, I worried. But something more emerged—a glimmer of hope. A change. Definitely a carrying forward.

My supervisors, while familiar with Meditation and Focusing, did not understand the mechanics, but they liked the results. I described to them the ways in which Meditation and Focusing created a sense of quiet by listening to the body in a gentle way; how the body can relax and release physical and mental tension—calming the busy mind and allowing for peace, wisdom, and safety in the present. I explained that continued practice allows one the realization that in times of distress, these modalities can be used as resources.

In a short time, my caseload was filled with heavily medicated pain patients suffering co-morbidly with severe depression, anxiety, and intense anger. No one else wanted to deal with them, because they were difficult, noncompliant, easily agitated, but primarily because they did not seem to improve in any way, regardless of the intervention. I believed Focusing would help them, and at that point I had a missionary's zeal that belied my lack of experience. Relaxing them enough to even get to Focusing required meditative breathing. Immediately after intakes, I discussed the benefits of Mindfulness Meditation: I impressed them with the quality and results of the literature I cited. My patients had tried everything, they thought. They had been shuffled from primary care to specialties, pain management, psychiatrists, and physical therapy. They were pain. And now they were presented with a promising new way to manage their pain.

My standard protocol after the intake became a three-part intervention. It takes up an entire session, but because it instills hope that more will come, I saw an immediate benefit. I taught the client to breathe (Mindfulness Meditation), to relax (body scan), and become present (Clearing a Space). The relaxing body scan is useful for identifying the pain and non-pain parts and overwhelmed and not overwhelmed parts (which could be a fingernail or an ear). The body scan attempts to make those painful or overwhelmed parts comfortable.

Then, I would move into Clearing a Space. This step would often allow the patient to feel better than when they arrived. After the first few times of meditation with Clearing a Space the patients looked forward to coming in and finding some relief. They had more difficulty with meditating at home. After I explained that it was impossible to do it wrong, most patients put in the effort. I worried initially that I had to combine modalities because I couldn't tolerate their pain and my inability to *fix them*. I sensed it was my desire to share *the something* that seemed to work.

SEA TURTLES, TRADER JOE COFFEE CANS, AND OTHER METAPHORS

I have witnessed that the image that comes in Clearing a Space can be used over and over until another takes its place. My favorite is with a fragile woman who carefully places her issues and concerns into a Trader Joe coffee can and puts it in the freezer. She can feel better, and still know all of those worries are close by if for some reason it is necessary to resurrect them.

Clearing a Space is a joy to me, because it is the prelude to becoming whole without regret. It allows for the work to begin and then for the client and myself to make sense of it all. I believe we need to make sense of struggles in order to acknowledge them fully and move on without regret. Sometimes the struggles are easy to sense: a heaviness in the pit of the belly making it difficult to even move, an ache in the chest like a boulder pressing on the heart, a searing burn in the throat refusing to give voice a choice to communicate. Other times, most times, the bodily sensations are subtle.

Attention must be directed to the hurting parts that are usually taken for granted. I instruct them to notice the tickle, the butterflies, the slightly rolling nausea, and especially to acknowledge the existence of something there. I ask them to allow for the faint sensations to come into consciousness. I encourage them to slow down to listen and to translate these sensations into left-brain language.

“Give the experience...the feelings...inside your body...enough space to expand and allow yourself to sense the whole of it,” I tell them. “The meaning may be vague in the beginning, yet there is a willingness for it to become clear. Issues and concerns may come up...just welcome whatever comes...”

For most of my clients there are too many issues to examine each individual one in its entirety in the limited time we share. Sometimes the issues are so enmeshed that it would take too long to separate them. These issues, after all, are interfering with *the now*. They are mostly coming from the past; perhaps, a few issues present warnings for the future, but there is no place for them in the here and now. Multiple issues can be explored individually by giving the client time, with the suggestion to: “Take a quiet moment to sense inside and ask...*What needs my attention, right now...?*”

And the Clearing a Space procedure normally changes from session to session, generally presenting a surprise for both of us.

I quietly suggest, “With honor and respect, request if it is okay to relocate that issue out of your belly for now. Allow a way for it to move. The issue appears sometimes as an image, a gesture, a word.” The process is like magic. I am humbled and filled with a sense of wonder. *Ask and you shall receive.* Just listen for the answer. I observe their faces, body language, sounds. Sometimes their reactions include tears and sobs or laughter. Many times the word ‘freedom’ comes up. An opening appears and allows for more to emerge.

As one client put it:

An old, large, wise sea turtle swims gracefully up from the water and embraces me, gently removing all of the troubles, leaving a sense of relief. And then I feel tremendous guilt that I have unloaded all of that pain on that beautiful creature. And I see at the bottom of the ocean, the sea turtle drops all of the pain, and turns and smiles at me, then vanishes. I sob with joy unremorsefully.

In the words of another,

It happens with great speed. My arms are stretched tightly over my head. My wrists are bound with thick handcuffs. Suddenly without notice, the handcuffs break and my arms fly open. Freedom. The way forward has become clear.

And yet another,

There are so many issues. They will not go together. They demand acknowledgement individually. I name each, and then that process allows me to place each one gently on the weight rack behind me. When they are all there on the rack, my body is light and stretches out fully in the air.

So the first three parts in my practice involve: Breathing (Mindfulness Meditation), body scan (relaxation), and Clearing a Space (release). They are the beginning of the healing process. I encourage my clients to practice meditation and Clearing a Space at home. I encourage and support their practice, and explain to them that they can participate in their own healing, and have a *sense that their lives can be better.* And I tell them that I will be there to help for as long as they need me to be. A sense of safety and hope has been established.

FOCUSING AND CARRYING FORWARD

H. is a 47-year-old woman, in the process of divorce for the second time from a husband who insists on extra marital affairs and refuses to contribute financially to the household. They have five children. H.’s primary care physician referred her to me because she suffered with thyroid cancer, major depression, and severe anger management issues. She described rage as an all-consuming emotion that she had no control over. She said this is not who she

is, and she wanted to rid herself of these intense feelings. After the intake, I went through my three-step protocol. She began begun to practice mindfulness meditation with Clearing a Space at home at least three times a week, beginning with 10-minute sessions. On our fourth session after Clearing a Space, the anger needed attention. (T = therapist C = client)

T: See if you can manage to notice the anger at a distance (I was concerned that she would “fall into the anger”)

C: The anger is on a shelf, covered in dust.

T: It has been there a long time... (I feel it, too...)

C: Getting bigger. Feeling it all inside. (She gestured to her core, under her chin to her lap in a quick violent movement, her face contorted)

T: Maybe... see what you might want to do with it? (I whispered very gently, never moving my eyes away from her, sitting knee to knee.)

C: Get rid of it.

T: Ummm... How?

C: Put it in a bin.

T: You want to put it in a bin... (She nods yes) Can you see if the bin has a color?

C: Green.

T: Ummm... How will the anger get in the bin?

C: I don't know, but I don't want to touch it.

T: Is there someone there that can help you?

C: Yes. He is putting it in the bin.

T: He's putting in the bin... with the dust...

C: Yes, now he's putting on the lid.

T: It is all gone? Duck taped up? (I sense it is being sealed. I see duct tape—she corrects me. She doesn't care that I am mistaken in what is going around the bin. It all flows easily.)

C: He's putting a chain around it... he's dragging it away.

T: He's dragging it away... Check and see how that feels?

C: It feels less grey, it is turning to colors—yellow and green. (Many people associate yellow with harmony and green with wellbeing.)

T: Can you spend some time in those colors? In that space? (This is a part of a healing meditation I teach to my meditation students.)

C: (smiling) It feels so different, I feel free.

T: Enjoy that feeling of freedom. (Client spends time in that open bright place.)

C: There are flowers. IT FEELS GOOD.

T: Maybe notice in your body where you feel that?

C: (gestures all around her center.) It feels like freedom.

T: Maybe take a little time to enjoy that feeling of freedom... (Client frowns)

T: I see a frown on your face... What are you seeing?

C: Ashamed. I am so ashamed.

T: So there is a feeling there... like ashamed... maybe you can see... sense where you carry that shame inside...

C: Around my heart—a heaviness (client gestured)

T: Can you be with that feeling at a distance for a while. (Client nods.)

T: How is that?

C: Afraid.

T: Let's spend some time with the afraid-part...just keeping it company, no judgments, no expectations, just friendly curiosity.

C: It is getting a little lighter.

T: You feel it getting a little lighter...Can you send that part some gentle, warm energy...(Time passes.)

C: (smiling) It is getting better.

Notice how the anger uncovered the ashamed feeling. I didn't pry into the ashamed feeling. I don't need to know the whole of that. Most importantly I didn't judge it, I had no expectations of it, and neither did H. Then the afraid emerged. Fear is a base emotion. H. had built up many things to be afraid of—for example, *Will I even live? Who will nurture my children if I don't? Will I be in pain?* Therefore, my intention is to assist H. in finding inner resources leading to peace and harmony. We discuss how life continues and challenges occur everyday, but we can use meditation and Focusing as a resource to return to a safe place even if it is temporary. And from that practice comes hope. And hope is life enhancing. And code rewriting is carrying forward.

CARRYING FORWARD

S., a woman with severe sensory and pain issues, comes to a solution about her working until she reaches sensory overload. Her body or unconscious creates the image of a bag—this much weeding, garden waste is enough at one time. Then she moves on to an easier, enjoyable task—planting bulbs. It is okay to not complete each task fully—just enough. She senses the rightness of the stop-place, before the pain—the noise begins. She goes on to implement this new way of being in her garden. Somehow her compulsion to do it all at one time has been released. “But how can I be sure it will last?” Acknowledging the source in the left-brain is not sufficient. Without directing S.—and even then would she believe me if I said your mother taught you this, beat it into you—let it go, let her go, put her on a shelf, forget about this erroneous teaching...No! It must come from within her.

S. and I terminated therapy shortly afterwards. We spoke on the telephone about six months later. She thanked me and said her life is great. Her disability has improved, her fear of relationship involvement diminished, she is living happily with her significant (new) other, and life in all respects is much better. She said she owes that to Focusing, Meditation, EMDR, and using her resources—friends. It was clear that our intervention was successful. Last year she contacted me after she received a cancer diagnosis for a “refuel”. We met three times. Last month she sent me a note—six months all clear and enjoying life more than ever. I felt so happy for her, knowing she was well, and that she has an inner knowing of what she needs and a way to check inside and find her own personally meaningful answers. I sensed relief, gratitude, and calm in me.

Forward movement is a gentle result of these three interventions. Arriving at that point means beginning with safety. A deep sense of safety is established in the therapy room in the initial interactions of therapist and client when they engage in an energetic connection or mirror neurons. Asking questions to understand where the client is in terms of pain and trauma experience is helpful when journeying with her in the Focusing experience. The Clearing a Space step helps to identify the issues and concerns and lays the groundwork

for the client to acknowledge and then to contemplate releasing painful experiences. The images, gestures, words, hold a plethora of meaning and guide the way for a resolution. When a client experiences this level of meaning, it resonates so strongly within that s/he has a renewed sense of hope and a desire for life that includes joy and creativity.

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INTEGRATION FOR INCREASED SAFETY AND CARRYING FORWARD

Elizabeth Lehmann, MA, MSW, LCSW

INTRODUCTION

For many years, safely and profoundly transforming emotional suffering, my own and others, has been one of my heart's deepest desires. Felt-sensing has been a fundamental part of this, my ongoing transformational process, at first implicitly and then explicitly, as I learned Focusing.

Given that the Focusing community is an international one, I want to acknowledge that being an American Caucasian female who lived in New York City for sixteen years is undoubtedly reflected in the culturally bound ways and settings in which I've transformed emotional suffering.

The unexpected deadly heart attack of my father, a few days after my thirtieth birthday in 1983, catapulted me into in-depth psychoanalytic psychotherapy, the reigning therapeutic approach in New York City at the time. Psychotherapy made such a remarkable difference in my life that several years later, with a burning desire to help others as I had been helped, I embarked upon a Masters degree in clinical social work in 1990. This was while also continuing my already established career as a professional photographer.

SELF PSYCHOLOGY AND EMPATHIC EXPLORATION

During my first year of social work school, my clinical supervisor introduced me to the theoretical orientation and practice of psychoanalytic Self Psychology, which deeply resonated with me then, and was how I practiced psychotherapy for several years thereafter. Among other things, Self Psychology's dedication to "experience near" empathic understanding of people as opposed to an "experience distant" understanding really felt right to me.

ENCOUNTERING EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION AND REPROCESSING® (EMDR) AS "SPEED FOCUSING"

My first foray outside of psychoanalytic psychotherapy was in 1995, when I began Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) training, originally developed by Francine Shapiro (Shapiro 2001) and now widely used as a treatment for trauma. At the time, another Self Psychologist I was close to playfully chided me about pursuing EMDR and even tried to talk me out of going to the training. After reading an article about EMDR in a popular magazine, however, in which both excitement and skepticism were expressed, something inside of me felt very drawn to it. In retrospect, there was a part of me already sensing that traditional talk therapy was not sufficient to facilitate the kind of deep change I sought, personally and professionally.

With fear and trepidation, yet strongly sensing EMDR was an important aspect of my quest to deeply and safely transform emotional suffering, I went by myself on a train out to New Brunswick, New Jersey where I completed level one of EMDR training. During the EMDR practice exercises, I revisited a humiliating childhood memory that I had already spent time with in my psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The memory still made me wince whenever I recalled it, but—to my utter amazement—following the EMDR processing, this painful memory had lost all its sting.

Excited by my encounter with EMDR, I returned to New York City and shared my remarkable experience with a beloved mentor who laughed and dismissed it, explaining it away as a transference relationship with the EMDR technique. Crestfallen and taken aback, I nevertheless asserted that regardless of my mentor's interpretation, I experienced EMDR as being powerfully effective, and I had every intention of pursuing it further. In retrospect, this reflects my deep faith in my *lived experience*, even when I do not yet have a conceptual framework to hang it on.

I continued my exploration of EMDR with ongoing practice sessions with a colleague, as well as some paid sessions with another EMDR therapist. I also sought EMDR supervision and started encouraging my clients to consider experiencing it as part of their therapy.

Introducing EMDR into psychoanalytic psychotherapy, wherein many clients were lying down on the couch, was no small feat. Among other things, it meant they would have to sit up and focus on visual bilateral stimulation, obviously a radical departure from what we had been doing. I shared with my clients that this new therapeutic technique worked for many people even though how it worked was still unclear. I shared that I believed EMDR potentially could be helpful in facilitating the changes they desired.

In other words, I provided my clients with some psychoeducation, presented a case for them trying it, and explored what came up for them in relation to my suggestion. Somewhat surprisingly, several of my clients agreed to an EMDR session rather than a regular psychoanalytic psychotherapy session. This was my first experience combining two therapeutic approaches.

I found it nerve racking to embark upon EMDR with my psychoanalytic clients, given that I was drawing upon only a weekend of training and some additional practice sessions. Part of the EMDR protocol includes processing what the client finds disturbing by doing several "sets" of bilateral stimulation. After each set, the therapist checks with the client to see what came up for them. The immediate response I got from my first EMDR client was that I reminded him of an alien from another planet, which was both unexpected and disconcerting. We obviously spent time with that before the EMDR processing continued.

Another beginning EMDR session involved my client reporting that he noticed "nothing" throughout the processing. At the time I experienced an intense inner dialogue where I seriously questioned if I was doing EMDR correctly, and wondered if I should refund the session fee since it didn't seem to be working. I persevered and suggested at the end of the session that although nothing popped up, the client's process would continue and something might even present itself in a dream.

Given what seemingly had *not* happened during that EMDR session, I was shocked when my client returned the next session. He shared that while nothing had emerged in

his dreams, his crippling performance anxiety had disappeared, and he had spontaneously performed in the way he had always longed for, but thought impossible.

At this same time, I sought out an EMDR therapist in the hopes of relieving my chronic insomnia. I told her about my first memory of my mother persuading me to throw my beloved pacifier out of our car window as we drove to my grandparents' house. Years later, when discussing this with my mother, she remarked, "Funny, but you never slept well after that". My thinking and hope was that if I targeted and processed this particular memory with EMDR, my insomnia would disappear. Although it did not, but to my utter and complete surprise, I spontaneously stopped smoking cigarettes and have never smoked since. This unexpected result from EMDR was stunning to me as smoking was something I had been losing a battle against for quite some time.

In retrospect, to be able to explore and then integrate something new and very foreign like EMDR into my practice, I had to strongly sense it would significantly facilitate greater change in my clients. Even more importantly, I had to be comfortable with moving outside of my comfort zone by taking a leap of faith and then continuing to live with not knowing exactly how EMDR worked. Experiences like the ones described above, as well as ongoing professional and personal support, provided the necessary wind under my wings for further exploration and eventual integration.

FOCUSING: DISCOVERING MY HOME

Less than a year later, in 1996, a client of mine who had experienced EMDR with me took an introductory workshop in Focusing and enthusiastically came into her next session exclaiming, "Elizabeth, you're gonna love this!" She was so right. I did and do love it, and to her I am forever grateful.

I immediately read Eugene Gendlin's introductory book, *Focusing* (Gendlin 1981), as well as Ann Weiser Cornell's *Power of Focusing* (1996), and took a beginning workshop for the general public offered at (what was then) Carolyn Worthing's house in Westchester, NY, and lead by Mary Lawlor.

In that workshop, I was astounded by how easily I could bypass my inner dialogue about something that bothered me, and get to *the whole of it* as it was held and experienced in my body. Furthermore, I discovered that by being with my felt, embodied sense of my problem in a specified way, I experienced a *shift* inside me that offered me a fresh way of being in relationship with whatever I Focused on. I also experienced Focusing as taking Self Psychology's stance of "empathic introspection" (asking and exploring what it's like for the client to be him or her) thereby making that exploration three dimensional. Focusing thereby infused my work as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist with greater aliveness.

Learning Focusing also made me explicitly aware of the innate human capacity to experientially resolve something and carry life forward, including how to access and intentionally work with this organic process. Focusing gave me a better understanding of what was happening as the client got better within psychoanalytic psychotherapy, EMDR—and, as I came to realize—any therapy for that matter. In fact, one friend and colleague now describes EMDR as "speed Focusing". There may be something about EMDR's bilateral

stimulation, combined with its protocol, that facilitates quickly accessing the felt sense, experiencing shifts, and carrying forward movement.

Another invaluable perspective I gained from Focusing is that each person's body has its own *inner knowingness*, which can be sensed into at any time to discover one's personal truth in relation to anything. This capacity serves as an incredible guide for living authentically, inside or outside the consultation room. I discovered that intentionally engaging my clients' felt-sensing process, as well as my own, throughout the session, helped EMDR and all other therapeutic approaches to more seamlessly unfold.

In addition to bringing my newly found understanding of Focusing into EMDR, I also began introducing Focusing-oriented interventions into my practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy by asking clients questions such as: "Is there some place in your body where you're experiencing this?"; "Perhaps you can welcome that?"; "Maybe you'd like to ask this place how it is feeling from its point of view?"; "Is there something it would like you to know?" and so on.

Although I discovered that not everyone can answer these kinds of questions immediately, especially those clients who are disconnected from certain aspects of their experience such as body sensations and/or feelings, many can. As a result, Focusing allowed many of my psychoanalytic clients to drop down into a deeper level of experiencing, connecting and being with their felt sense of something in a way that facilitated moving forward with their lives in an enriched meaningful way.

On the flip side, I also encountered some individual therapy clients who became overwhelmed with me guiding them to connect with their felt sense, as unprocessed traumatic experiences came flooding in, often quite surprisingly. One person I recall quit therapy with me right after getting flooded because it scared her so much, which greatly troubled me. The same thing also happened with a few workshop participants when I started teaching Focusing through The Focusing Institute a few years after being certified by Mary Hendricks Gendlin in 1999.

Especially for those clients who suffer from what the mental health field came to refer to as "complex trauma", where not only abuse was experienced repeatedly, but where the trauma took place within an environment replete with disapproval, hostility, and indifference, it is understandable how flooding occurred. In "The Body's Releasing Steps" Gendlin (1978) describes opening to the whole of something, as occurs in Focusing:

For example, if I am angry, that pushes me to hit or attack someone. This may or may not be what I will later be glad about. But if I let the anger lead me to that wider whole, 'all that which gets me angry', or 'that whole thing that is involved for me in this anger', then I will, for the moment, not feel only the anger, but a much wider, more global bodily sense of all the people, situations, alternatives, past and future that are involved in the context that makes me angry. That felt meaning (which is different than the emotion: anger) is my bodily living that situation. (p. 338).

It is not hard to imagine, then, how opening to the whole of something like anger when you are a trauma survivor who has experienced verbal and physical abuse could indeed be overwhelming. And if EMDR, or “speed Focusing”, takes you to the traumatic material more quickly, then the client would be overwhelmed even more. I soon discovered that some of my complex trauma clients were experiencing overwhelm even while doing the original first step of Focusing, “Clearing A Space”, a step which many other people find very helpful and life-affirming. However, I found that for a few clients, simply checking inside and identifying what was between them and feeling okay could be too much.

Keeping someone safe within their healing process became a big concern for me as early as 1996. Not surprisingly, safety had also become an openly expressed concern within the EMDR community, as some people were reportedly ending up in hospital emergency rooms because of EMDR processing. It had become evident to many therapists, myself included, that traversing the terrain of complex trauma was a slippery slope. With other therapists, I came to realize we needed to be able to access experience at the level of change, as identified by Gendlin, but much more skillfully than we had been doing.

In response to these therapy-induced mental health emergencies, EMDR practitioners began talking about needing to “resource” people. A resource is anything life-affirming, e.g. a positive memory, person, place, activity or personal capacity, that has a calming affect on your body. EMDR therapists began to import hypnotherapy techniques in order to create greater safety. By contrast, some of my psychoanalytic colleagues who were using EMDR claimed that the therapeutic relationship itself was enough of a resource for clients with complex trauma histories. Although I did both, the resourcing then taught by EMDR practitioners somehow felt like something imposed from the outside, while safety within the relationship did not feel sufficient. As a result, I became more cautious and took longer to get to know new clients before guiding them into deeper levels of experiencing, which helped. However, based on previous upending experiences, I still lived with uneasiness whenever I guided trauma survivors to go deeper.

As an adaptation, I developed a way to do “Focusing Lite”, if you will, embodying what Gendlin refers to as “the Focusing attitude”. I would ask clients Focusing-informed questions that were directed at their felt sense of something, without actually guiding them to go inside their body and directly access the whole of it. For example, when clients mentioned something disturbing, I would ask them questions such as: “Perhaps it would be helpful to ask yourself what gets to you the most about this?”; “Might there be more about this?”; and “Maybe there’s a sense of what would bring some easing?”.

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING (SE) AND SAFE EMBODIMENT

It was not until I started “Somatic Experiencing” (SE) training in New York City in 2005 that I finally found some other, more effective ways to resource people. Peter Levine, the developer of SE, holds doctorates in Medical Biophysics as well as Psychology, served as a stress consultant for NASA, and is very interested in both the physiological and psychological expression of stress. As many of you know, he studied Focusing as well as other approaches before developing SE.

A few of the many things I found helpful about SE (Levine 2005) were learning how to mitigate overwhelm by using the body itself as a resource, i.e. bringing awareness to a place in your body that's feeling more settled, as well as "pendulating" or moving back and forth between a settled and uncomfortable place in the body to titrate the processing experience. I was surprised to find that by using a somatic resource, rather than avoiding something more painful, naturally allowed clients a safe opening into the stuck trauma that needed processing.

SE gave me a better understanding of what happens in the nervous system when someone gets triggered, and in turn taught me how to help clients become calm through the use of a somatic resource while slowly processing trauma. My SE experience helped me think differently about what is referred to in Focusing as "process skipping" and "a stopped process". These two terms no longer seemed like forms of intentional avoidance, but could be understood as the nervous system's attempts to self-regulate. (See Stephen Porges' "Polyvagal Theory" (2011). I also found that sharing this neurobiological understanding with my clients greatly reduced their shame and empowered them.

Encountering Nancy J. Napier, my first SE teacher, with whom I thankfully worked in a small consultation group for several years, greatly expanded and grounded my ability to treat trauma experientially. Napier brought into SE years of previous trauma training such as Ericksonian hypnosis and EMDR, as well as her own way of working, described in her published work (Napier 1990, 1993). In addition to teaching SE, Napier also introduced me to mindfulness, her form of parts work, the welcoming and integration of spiritual experiences into psychotherapy, and more.

My additional training with Nancy Napier addressed my long-standing concerns about the emotional safety of trauma survivors and was just what the uneasy place within me had needed for years. Because SE is so clearly informed by Focusing, it was fairly easy for me to integrate what I learned. I was given many more moves for safely and effectively experientially healing trauma, which pleased me greatly.

RESTORING CONNECTION (RC): CONNECTING THE THREADS

I started sharing the teachings of Napier with the Focusing-oriented experiential study group of therapists I led from 2006–2009. Together we further sensed into the realms of body mind heart and spirit coming up with what felt like our own unique integration. I eventually called this approach "Restoring Connection (RC)" and later trademarked the name: Restoring Connection®.

When "Restoring Connection" came through me within the context of that experiential study group, it felt both inspired and special. In fact, there was a period of a few years that included the 2008 Focusing International where life felt quite magical at times, (as well as extremely challenging at other times.) I first presented "Restoring Connection" at the 2008 International Focusing Conference in Canada, and then at a New York Metro Focusing meeting in 2009, even though I was scared to introduce our newborn baby of "Restoring Connection (RC)" to the outside world. While our study group had marveled at and reveled in the birth of RC, I felt an anxious uncertainty as to how others might receive it. The

Focusing community was chosen for our baby's first viewing because the study group had started with Focusing and then expanded it from there to integrate other practices. Also, my overall felt-sense of the Focusing community was that it was a warm and welcoming one. Nevertheless, I remained nervous.

My husband, close friends and colleagues, as well as the study group who came with me to the International, all encouraged me. Without their support I would not have had the courage to present.

Something else that concerned me was that my presentation was scheduled at the same time as presentations of some of the most well known international teachers of Focusing. When I noticed this in the program, my immediate thought was, "Oh no! Nobody's going to want to come to my presentation."

That thought plagued me until the gathering at the initial conference mixer. Christel Kraft, whose name I knew from the Focusing discussion list, recognized my name from my e-mailed description of "Restoring Connection" and brightly and enthusiastically said, "I'm coming to your presentation tomorrow." To my amazement she did, as did so many others that additional chairs had to be brought in from another room. Furthermore, throughout the conference, people who had attended my presentation, including Christel, encouraged me. (I subsequently learned that Christel herself was integrating along similar lines several years before I was, as demonstrated in her 1999 book *Energy Flow Focusing Explorations: Passageways Into Your Hidden Treasure*.)

Another book I bought at the 2008 International was *Focusing with Your Whole Body* by Addie van der Kooy and Kevin McEvenue. I had known about Whole Body Focusing for years and had even recommended bodyworker friends to the trainings, but I hadn't thought it was applicable to me because I had initially thought less holistically.

When I read and listened to Addie and Kevin's Wholebody Focusing work, which acknowledged and integrated SE into its approach, I realized that it was so much along the same lines of what was emerging within me that I panicked and thought, "Oh my God! They're going to think I plagiarized them." So I e-mailed both Kevin and Addie, and they very graciously responded, telling me not to worry about it and to please share with them whatever further emerged.

I have had this kind of serendipitous experience several times now over the years, where I have sensed something newly emerging from within me, only to discover that someone else has already written about the same phenomena. There seems to be a larger knowing that we're able to access, sense into and express, as it uniquely comes through us.

"Restoring Connection" can be offered one-on-one or within a group as a way to bring awareness to and safely cultivate the movements of Focusing with complementary experiential techniques and practices for effecting the greatest change—integrating what I've found to be the best of the best transformational approaches into one. Beneficial in and of itself, the process can also serve as a wonderful complement to other modalities, e.g. bodywork, coaching and psychotherapy, to name a few. You can read more about it at www.RestoringConnection.com.

ACCELERATED EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY (AEDP): RELATIONSHIP AND DYADIC REGULATION

The way I had been taught Focusing and other experiential modalities such as hypnotherapy, Somatic Experiencing and parts work, was that the interpersonal relationship hummed along in the background, supporting the client's unfolding of their inner process. However, the client-therapy relationship wasn't explicitly focused upon unless the client referred to it in their process.

Sometime around 2000 I had stopped identifying with being a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and instead considered myself to be an experiential one. Furthermore, I'd eventually come to resonate with many aspects of John Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which naturally drew me to Diana Fosha's experiential application of it in her model, "Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy" (AEDP).

Interestingly enough, Bowlby developed attachment theory as a way of better explaining behavior he was observing in children separated from their parents during World War II, that he felt couldn't be understood by Freudian drive theory. This kind of behavior is now commonly referred to as 'attachment trauma' and the explicit therapeutic use of the relationship itself is considered essential for healing this kind of trauma.

With client consent, AEDP uses videotapes of client sessions for training purposes. Watching Fosha's work, I was taken with how she seamlessly and directly used herself, moment to moment, to address developmental trauma. I was struck by how, in many respects, Fosha appeared to be a natural Focuser, which also appealed to me. I decided, then, to immerse myself in AEDP, which included being in a small supervision group with Fosha for a few years, as well as in individual therapy for awhile with a seasoned AEDP practitioner.

Some of what was of particular significance to me and contributed to my further development of "Restoring Connection", was learning how to make the therapist-client relationship explicit and experiential, in order to effectively work with it to heal developmental trauma (Fosha 2003). One aspect of this fosters nervous system regulation dyadically, that is through the relationship itself. For example, the AEDP-informed therapist might speak more slowly in a soothing tone of voice and reassuringly saying something like "I'm right here with you", when the client taps into something highly disturbing. Furthermore, bringing awareness to and celebrating the client's expressions of resilience and life forward movement, as they naturally occur in-session, has been invaluable. I have found these AEDP-inspired interventions to be wonderful ways to resource, regulate, keep people safe, and be an integral part of processing their trauma.

In November of 2009, while beginning to further explore AEDP, I attended the first world conference on Focusing Oriented Psychotherapies. While there, I discussed with colleagues during meal times my safety concerns about using Focusing with certain clients. Gendlin was scheduled to offer a question and answer period in which he had explicitly invited people to ask some hard questions.

Sitting in the back of the conference room, right next to Mary Hendricks Gendlin, I agonized over whether or not to directly express to Gendlin the safety concerns I had raised with others. I never had to make that choice because someone I had shared my concerns with during a meal stood up in the front of the room, turned and looked around until he found

me, and pointed right at me as if to say, “Ask him your question”. So I mustered my courage, stood up and anxiously began: “I’ve found that just as Focusing can be a doorway to the transpersonal, it can also be a doorway to trauma.” I went from there, shaking like a leaf as I spoke. Thankfully, the person who had pointed at me saw my nervousness and came around to physically support me so that I was able to continue standing while I discussed this with Gendlin. Gendlin, responding to me in a very supportive and encouraging manner, did not get defensive, but openly acknowledged that what I said was true, that he had been aware of this issue for about fifteen years, and that it needed to be better addressed.

A few weeks later, after I stopped shaking internally, I sent Gendlin an e-mail and thanked him for meeting me just where I needed to be met, saying that if he had responded in a dismissive way, it would have been a totally different experience for me. Gendlin in turn responded by saying he was glad he had been able to respond to me in the way that he did.

Since then, people within The Focusing Institute have done many things to more directly address safety concerns. It warms my heart whenever I hear of another one.

RESILIENT-YOU (RY) AUDIO PROGRAM: REGULATION AND RESOURCING IN THERAPY AND BEYOND

Although I haven’t personally experienced overwhelm while learning and practicing Focusing for over fifteen years, I have occasionally felt overwhelmed while encountering other powerful experiential approaches. Getting thrown into a fight, flight or freeze response is not one of my favorite things, nor do I relish inadvertently triggering this in others. Furthermore, when it does happen, I want to be able to quickly right myself as well as be able to help others do the same.

Addressing my felt need for safe, non-triggering processing was the impetus for adding what I learned from SE and Napier to Focusing and is an important beginning part of what emerged as “Restoring Connection”. With the help of invaluable assistance, feedback and support from many people, I have spent the last several years developing an audio program “RESILIENT-YOU®”, available through “CD Baby”, “iTunes” and “Amazon”, which I introduce to clients in their first or second session. As the listener’s companion and guide, together we experience a smorgasbord of simple, powerful ways to safely manage overwhelm, be it related to traumatic material or not. Also provided in R-Y is enlightening information about the nervous system’s regulatory process, including how to work with it masterfully.

Imbued with Focusing, R-Y integrates aspects of many of the approaches I have already mentioned in this article. In one selection of R-Y, after guiding the listener to identify their existing inner and outer resources, I take them through a guided experience, “Connecting With Your Resource”, which explicitly includes Focusing’s steps two, three and four. Introducing people to steps of Focusing by guiding them to first get a felt-sense of something positive and soothing in their life, contributes to setting the stage for safely processing trauma that may emerge. As previously explained, step one of Focusing, “Clearing A Space” indeed does this for many, yet not for all.

Offered as an initial stepping stone, my audio program is a safety bridge that allows people to enter and work from the inner place where deep change occurs, a place they may

not otherwise access and stay with for awhile. Because I too use what is offered on R-Y, I am able to self-regulate during experiential trainings, allowing me to hang in there and then learn other powerful techniques to combine with Focusing. I am tremendously relieved to be able to self-regulate while also providing my therapy clients and workshop participants the means to do so, as well. After completing the audio program and making it widely available to the general public, I realized I had come full circle and finally completed what I had always intended, that is to address my concern about safety which began in 1996.

Allow me to share a personal example of how, in an experiential workshop I attended, I used my self-regulation tools in order to avoid overwhelm and process-stopping. I was learning a powerful way to shift something when stuck. I thought I was choosing a fairly benign problem to address, i.e. getting through a pile of mail. When asked a series of questions to uncover my underlying avoidance, I said the task seemed tediously boring, and then eventually said it felt “overwhelming”. I was guided to really feel the overwhelm. When I did, a rush of intense feelings came flooding in, including an image of a photo I’d seen of a Japanese person riding their bike along a shore line with a gigantic Tsunami wave headed toward them.

Given my understanding of nervous system dysregulation, I was able to immediately recognize what was happening and without feeling ashamed say, “I can’t continue like this. It’s too much for me.” And with that, I internally took a step back while breathing in through my nose and out through my mouth, creating needed distance between me and the whole of “overwhelm”. I further helped my nervous system regulate by taking the Tsunami image and placing it outside of myself at a comfortable distance, where I could look *at* it rather than feel taken over *by* it. And with that, I was able to safely move forward in this guided process to the point where the thought of my pile of mail was no longer overwhelming, and I was capable of tackling it—a powerful shift indeed. So there you have it, the combination of creating safety, facilitated change, and carrying life forward.

EXPERIENTIAL JUXTAPOSITION AND COHERENCE THERAPY: MAKING TRANSFORMATION PRECISE

Something I’m very excited about now is how I am learning to further pinpoint transformational change moments, thereby consciously setting the stage for, as well as further facilitating them. Bruce Ecker and his “Coherence Therapy” colleagues seem to be doing just that, based upon their understanding of recent memory reconsolidation research, which actively uses the experiential juxtaposition of contrasting “old” and “new” learnings to create transformational change. As Ecker, et al write in *Unlocking The Emotional Brain*, juxtapositions occur spontaneously within change processes like Focusing, EMDR, Gestalt, AEDP and other approaches, “...and carrying it out *knowingly* can significantly increase a practitioner’s frequency of achieving powerful therapeutic results” (2012, p. 5).

As I look back on the life changing experiences I’ve had on both the receiving and giving end, inside and outside the consultation room, it does seem probable that it has been at times of experiential juxtaposition that the most profound shifts have occurred. An example of this kind of shift occurred while working with an adult suffering from complex trauma. My client experienced an intense global sense of helplessness, aloneness and belief that people are not to be trusted because they will always hurt you. Prior to this session, my

client had gotten triggered by recent contact with his family of origin. Efforts on my part to facilitate creating some internal space between his painfully crushing process and himself was futile. Finally, I said, “Right here, in this moment, can you sense that I am here for you and will not hurt you?” With this, he paused, quietly sensed into his experience of me then and there, and very slowly said “Yes I can”. He went on to express how responsive he felt I’d been, how touched he was by my responsiveness, and how appreciative he was of me.

Bringing his awareness to the juxtaposition of past experience which had taken hold of him—in contrast happening with me in the present moment—created the most profound shift to date in our work together. Of course this alone did not completely change this person’s life. Thankfully other juxtaposition experiences continued to occur inside and outside their therapy. With complex trauma it takes experience after experience like this, including their integration, until a tipping point results in a shift in the personality. Perhaps further pinpointing the process of experiential juxtaposition and therapeutic (memory) reconsolidation is a carrying forward of Gendlin and Rogers’ collaborative research on change?

FOCUSING AGAIN: RETURNING TO HOME BASE AND FURTHER INTEGRATION

Not surprisingly, I’ve found using the practice of Focusing for “discovering the emotional truth” of a presenting problem, following Ecker et al’s “Coherence Therapy” to be invaluable. In fact, I strongly believe that anyone who is working experientially, regardless of approach, would tremendously benefit from learning Focusing because Focusing makes explicit the innate human process of experientially resolving something and carrying life forward, the process first identified by Gendlin and Rogers. By learning the practice of Focusing, one learns to make direct contact with, gain a visceral understanding of, and ultimately trust his or her organic process. Without Focusing, I believe clients and therapists alike end up groping in the dark, inadvertently bumping into “experiential truths”. I have often thought in experiential trainings, how much better off people would be if they had Focusing to ground them in working experientially. With Focusing as a base, there is so much more a therapist can then learn and effectively integrate, as exemplified by my ongoing work with “Restoring Connection”.

Part of this base of understanding that Focusing provides is the awareness that each person’s body has its own inner knowingness which can be sensed into at any time in order to discover personal truths. No *matter* what other therapeutic approach is used, Focusing can offer embodied knowing. Inviting clients to sense into their body’s wisdom, as well as sensing into your own as the therapist, serves as a reliable guide for safely navigating within any deeply transformative process.

Very simply stated, with attuned-holding-presence as my stance, I now find myself working fairly seamlessly, sensing into what therapeutic approach might be right in the moment, in order to help a client become unstuck and safely restore connection with their organic carrying life forward process. I now can draw from a range of interventions that I have at my disposal. I even find myself improvising new strategies by first inviting the client to sense into whether something feels right or not as we proceed, and then together, co-creating new transformative experiences. Frequently checking in to find how something is landing inside of a client and then sharing what’s coming inside of me, as well as processing

what it was like to experience something that we experienced together, are some of the many dance moves.

In closing, there is so much more to all that I have shared with you here. As perhaps you can sense, within all of this is much implicit intricacy that hopefully we can explore further at another time. How deeply gratifying it is for me to realize that my heart's deepest desire—to safely and profoundly transform emotional suffering—is continuously being further realized. With felt-sensing as both my home base and guide, I have been able to tolerate moving outside of my comfort zone, to take leaps of faith, to learn to live with not-knowing, and seek out and be open to various life changing experiences, as well as ongoing professional and personal support, to continue to make safe transformation possible. I am profoundly grateful for how the Focusing process itself, as well as people within our Focusing community and the opportunities afforded me, including writing this article, have been such an integral part of fulfilling my heart's desire.

It seems fitting to leave you with this Gendlin quote: "The change we want is really a change from a blocked life process (i.e., from no change to change.) It does not go counter to the nature of ourselves, but restores it." (1978).

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INTEGRATING FOCUSING WITH THE EXPRESSIVE ARTS THERAPIES AND MINDFULNESS

Laury Rappaport, Ph.D., MFT, ATR-BC, REAT

The roots of integrating Focusing, expressive arts and mindfulness begins with my personal experience of each practice, evolves into applying the processes as a psychotherapist with others in a variety of settings, and culminates in developing both a theoretical and practice framework that is now recognized in other fields. My hope is that this article will reflect the ways that Focusing is a living process within each of us, how it is present within the actions of what we do, and how it can be developed and integrated with other life activities to enhance meaning and access to our inner wisdom. Additionally, my intention is that this article will elucidate how listening to the felt sense will unfold and offer a step that unfolds into other steps over time, deepening the synthesis of Focusing with other interests in life.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

I was first introduced to Focusing as a client in psychotherapy, 36 years ago in 1977. I didn't know that my therapist was doing something that is now named, "Focusing-Oriented Therapy." All I knew is that at specific moments, when I was on the edge of a feeling or something meaningful that I couldn't quite grasp, she would gently lower her eyes, point toward her chest, and say the following words to me: "Can you sense how that feels inside?"

As I listened inwardly, a sense of space opened up, time slowed down, and my eyes naturally lowered and closed. I waited, and often an image would arise. Sometimes a kinesthetic gesture would come, or just the right word or phrase that matched something within that was lying dormant. I later learned that Focusing describes this as *listening to my "felt sense"*—and that a word, phrase, image, gesture, or sound can serve as a symbol or "*handle*" for the felt sense (Gendlin, 1981). At times the felt sense was about something painful, sad, hurting, or angry; other times it was about joyful experiences; and other times it was simply clarifying content that was not emotional but rather a decision or topic I was struggling with. While this process in therapy felt new, after a few times of doing it, I had an inner sense of knowing that something about it was familiar. It then clicked—there was something similar in this process of Focusing that occurred when I created art as a form of self-expression and inquiry.

Eight years prior to this therapy experience, while still in high school, I discovered the healing power of creating art by listening within. After coming home from school, I would go into my room, close the door, and eventually sit down on the floor. Somehow, there was a sketchpad and charcoal sticks. During those teenage years of searching to discover "Who am I?" and "What is the meaning in life?", I gently closed my eyes and sat meditatively. After a couple of minutes, my awareness dropped into my body, where eventually an image

would arise. It was not a mental image formed in my mind but rather an image that emerged from a felt sense, and emerged most often from the inside of my body, typically on the inside in the trunk area between my neck and pelvis. I developed this image into visual art. As I created art, I noticed that the image connected to something important and deep within me, and the artistic process carried the experience further. I always felt better after drawing, even if the images reflected pain and suffering.

My awareness of the interconnections between Focusing and art continued to grow throughout my graduate studies in Expressive Arts Therapy and has continued as a clinician for over 30 years. During this same time period of time, I have pursued meditation training and investigation into various spiritual traditions. Similarly, during meditation, I noticed particular qualities and states of being that are resonant with what happens while Focusing and engaging in the arts. The rich crossing of Focusing, expressive arts, and mindfulness is further explained below.

CROSSING FOCUSING, EXPRESSIVE ARTS AND MINDFULNESS

Clinical Application

Once I began to learn Focusing during the same time period of graduate training in the expressive arts, I sensed that Gendlin's Focusing model of six steps (Gendlin 1981) could be integrated with the expressive arts and applied clinically. The first population that I tried it out with was with adults in a psychiatric day treatment center in 1979. I invited the group to begin with Clearing a Space. Instead of the usual guiding within the body with eyes closed, I offered the clients an art journal, and asked them to begin by writing down anything in the way of being "*all fine*" *right now*. I chose this approach since most of the clients suffered from psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and schizo-affective disorder. Most of the clients would often be overwhelmed with thoughts or feelings, and at times, not be able to discern "what was real," or how to ground themselves. Inviting the clients to begin by using the traditional Focusing invitation of "going inside" seemed too threatening.

During this time, I was grateful to read several articles that addressed Focusing with a similar population: "Therapeutic procedures with schizophrenic patients" (Gendlin 1972) and "Teaching the very confused how to make sense: an experiential approach to modular training with psychotics" (Egendorf and Jacobson, 1982). I was relieved to see that Gendlin also didn't do "regular" Focusing—but rather did a great deal of listening, keeping company with the client, and being present. He wasn't inviting them to sit, close their eyes and proceed with the six Focusing steps that he developed to teach people Focusing (i.e. 1. clear a space; 2. felt sense; 3. handle/symbol; 4. resonate 5. ask and 6. receive; Gendlin 1981).

The journals were effective. Clients liked writing things down and were able to discover things beyond their habitual ways of noticing their issues. Once the issues were written down, I then guided the group: "Keeping the issues that you just wrote down separate, now turn the page to a nice clear page. Sense how it feels to leave the issues on the other page, and take a little vacation from them. See how it feels in your body when you have some distance from those issues. Now, see if there are colors, shapes, or images that match the felt sense

inside of how the “all fine place” feels. When you’re ready, use the art materials to create an image. If a word or phrase comes, feel free to add that, too.”

I was amazed at the images of well-being that emerged. Most of the clients reported feeling energized, calm, peaceful, and happier. Sometimes we just did Clearing a Space. Other times, I guided the group through the rest of the Focusing steps: choose an issue, draw how it feels (felt sense and handle/symbol), resonate, ask it a question (e.g. “what does it need?”), and write an answer that comes to you. It was clear that the combination of writing and art accessed their felt sense—unfolding the body’s wisdom. The journal provided a safe container while the writing and art helped to carry their experience in a *life forward* direction. As I continued to know the clients, and as they began to feel safer with their inner experience, I was eventually able to guide them in a way where they felt they were able to close their eyes, listen to their bodily felt sense, symbolize what they were experiencing through writing, art, creative movement, and music or sound.

Excited about this combination of Focusing with the expressive arts, I wanted to share this approach with others. Ann Weiser Cornell welcomed my writing two articles for her newsletter, *The Focusing Connection*. The first article, ‘Focusing and Art Therapy,’ provided a means for me to articulate this powerful interconnection (Rappaport, 1988). In this article I demonstrated how art could be used to symbolize a *felt sense* and *felt shift*, and how visual art could be used with Gendlin’s Focusing steps. The second article, described how I integrated creative movement and art with Focusing to reduce stress (Rappaport, 1993). During that era, programs, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction, were not widely known—or, if they were, the information was not easily accessed as it was before the instant information access of the internet and search engines like Google. I simply listened to my own felt sense of what this population needed, and inwardly “heard” ways to try things out.

After working in the day treatment center, I started a psychotherapy practice. This is where I began to integrate the principles and practices of Focusing-Oriented Therapy (FOT). I was grateful when Gendlin’s book, *Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy* came out in 1996, as it addressed many important aspects of integrating Focusing into therapy. He also had chapters that addressed role-play, and dance-movement therapy that were useful for my work in integrating Focusing with the arts. (I had also read earlier articles on Focusing with movement and poetry in earlier editions of the *Focusing Folio*). I continued to try out using Focusing, the expressive arts, and mindfulness with a wide variety of clients—adults, adolescents, children, couples, families, groups—with a range of issues, such as depression, anxiety, trauma, chronic and terminal illnesses, communication challenges, and personal growth. I also applied Focusing and the expressive arts in relation to organizational development and staff training. In all of these instances, there were no guide-books. It took trusting—of both my felt sense and the space of the not-yet-known.

Conferences, Workshops and Teaching

I was excited by this combination and felt that Focusing offered the expressive arts field something that was missing, and the expressive arts offered something to Focusing. To bring this information to both fields, I began presenting workshops at conferences and developed courses for teaching in graduate training programs.

Bringing Expressive Arts to Focusing

To begin sharing this crossing of Focusing and the expressive arts, I presented a workshop on Focusing and Art Therapy at the Focusing International Conference in 1996. I remember at the end of the workshop, Marta Stapert, a Focusing Coordinator and pioneer of the Children's Focusing Corner, said that she learned something new about applying art with Focusing. Last year I communicated with Marta to find out what she learned, as I was interested in the history of art therapy within the Focusing community. An excerpt from the email that I sent to her said: *"I have been wanting to mention the history of the application of Focusing with art and include something about when you attended my workshop in Boston. It feels important as part of its "crossing." Would you feel ok to write something from that experience?"*

Marta described various influences about the crossing of Focusing and art, including the following:

"In 1988 Laury Rappaport wrote in The Focusing Connection Vol. V, no. 3, May, FOCUSING AND ART THERAPY. This was for me encouraging and confirming how symbolization by creative means was another way in Focusing next to the verbal expression."

Marta further elaborated her experience after attending the Focusing International Conference in Gloucester, MA (she had attended three workshops that connected Focusing with art):

"Laury Rappaport gave a workshop on 'Focusing and art'. After her introduction, Laury guided us into a Focusing experience. We were invited to express ourselves from the felt sense on paper. Laury guided us to stay with our symbolization and to keep working on it in an artistic way. It was to me a surprise that more experiences came up from this deepening process. Afterwards I reflected with Laury about my experience: 'My discovery about this expressive process is that inviting the Focuser to be with the symbolization in a more extensive, artistic way through accompanying by the Focusing therapist or guide, can carry the process forward in a deeper and more profound way than merely drawing.'"

I share this exchange to help illustrate the ways that the felt sense of crossing Focusing with art began as something within me, unfolded further through clinical application, and how both writing and presenting at conferences and other workshops can help to carry the work forward.

I continued presenting various approaches to integrating Focusing, the expressive arts therapies, and mindfulness at both the Focusing International and the Focusing-Oriented Therapy World Conference. Many Focusers told me how much they appreciated learning how the felt sense could easily be expressed through the arts. They learned how natural it is for a felt sense 'handle' or symbol to unfold into creative expression—an image into art;

gesture into movement; sound into music and voice; and a word or phrase into a poem or creative writing. The expressive arts provide a means to externalize the felt sense.

Bringing Focusing to Expressive Arts

When I learned Focusing, not just as a client but as a trainee in Focusing, I began to see how it enhanced my clinical skills as an expressive arts therapist. While I had exceptional training in using the arts in therapy, Focusing filled in the following missing pieces:

- *Focusing attitude of being “friendly,” curious, and accepting:* The expressive arts are known for fostering greater acceptance. A saying is, “It’s not about the product (what it looks like or how it sounds) but the process.” The Focusing attitude deepens acceptance toward the inner felt sense. I learned how to invite clients to be “friendly” toward their inner experience. If their art expression was of rage, I could say, “Can you be curious about it?” Or “Can you be friendly to that place of rage within you?”
- *Expressive arts from the felt sense:* Through Focusing I learned how to guide clients to take a moment to notice their felt sense—to see if there’s a word, image, gesture or sound that matched their felt sense. Once they received the handle/symbol, I invited them to express the handle/symbol through the arts. This was a different approach than most expressive arts exercises. Typically an art therapist might say, “Draw your fear.” At times, clients can simply proceed and draw their fear. Other times clients go blank—and are not aware of their fear. They sometimes feel forced to come up with something about their fear. Focusing taught me to help clients take time to listen inwardly and to wait...allowing time for a felt sense to form. A Focusing invitation to explore fear might be: “Take a moment to become aware of a fear...(pause). Sense inside the whole feel of the fear...(pause). See if there’s a word, phrase, image, gesture or sound that matches the felt sense of the fear...When you have it, feel free to express it through an art form that feels right.” With clients who may have first been able to draw their fear when simply asked to draw it, Focusing often brings something fresh and *not yet known* that was meaningful to know.
- *Focusing after expressive arts:* As I incorporated Focusing after the expressive arts, I began to notice that it provided benefits for clients. It gave me a way to guide clients to notice what they had experienced from the arts expression. Sometimes, Focusing helped the client to access the meaning of their artistic expression. Other times it helped them to feel more grounded after becoming absorbed in the creative process.
- *Listening:* Ever since learning Focusing as both a client and trainee, I gained a deeper appreciation for skillful, experiential listening as an integral part of the process. In expressive arts training, we may learn listening skills, but my Focusing training taught me a very exquisite way of attuning to the client’s unfolding experiential process in a way that helped to weave a seamless exploration and interaction of felt sense, artistic expression, listening, and the therapeutic relationship.

While I was bringing the expressive arts to the Focusing community through workshops, conferences, and publications, I also introduced Focusing to the expressive arts therapies professions. I designed a 3 credit graduate course for Lesley University entitled,

“Focusing and the Expressive Therapies.” The title has since been revised to “Focusing-Oriented Expressive Arts Therapies.” A variation of the course was offered at the California Institute of Integral Studies as a specific approach to expressive arts. I also designed a 1 credit course, “Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy” that was offered at Notre Dame de Namur University’s graduate program in Marriage and Family Therapy/Art Therapy. Although the courses were electives at all three universities, students often gave the feedback that they thought it should be a required class. Like me, they felt it gave them the skills to navigate the experiential process along with the expressive arts in therapy, and they felt more confident on their journey to becoming psychotherapists.

In addition to teaching, I have been presenting variations of Focusing with the Arts Therapies for the past 35 years at the American Art Therapy Conference, the International Association of Expressive Arts Therapies, the United States Association for Body-Oriented Psychotherapy, as well as other conferences and continuing education venues.

Publications

In my pursuit to share the crossing of Focusing with the expressive arts and mindfulness, I began to write for professional publications. The *Focusing Folio* provided a wonderful opportunity to share what I was finding through the application of Focusing and the expressive arts with a variety of clients. The first article written in 1998 described how to integrate Focusing and art therapy with post-traumatic stress disorder (Rappaport, 1998). In that article I was also able to connect the clinical practice of Focusing and art therapy with Judith Hermans’ (1992) three-stage model of trauma recovery. It felt exciting to find the interconnection between the expressive arts and Focusing practices and theory within the larger psychology field.

Perhaps a most significant unfolding of my felt sense occurred when something inside of me asked a turning-age-50 question: “What haven’t I done that I would like to do?” As I paused and waited for the answer to arise from within, I heard the following answer: “Write a book about Focusing and expressive arts.” Wow, I had not imagined myself writing a book before this! I didn’t really think of myself as a writer, despite having written a few articles. *It felt right*, although I was not completely confident about it. I feel I have been blessed with an ability to notice this felt sense and trust it—and this trusting is what led me to create art in my room and recognize it as a healing modality, rather than see it as a purely an aesthetic expression. I felt *carried forward* to pursue expressive arts and experiment with putting Focusing with the expressive arts—with many different populations (and with myself). I decided to follow this message delivered from my body’s knowing to write a book.

In 2009, I completed the book, *Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy: Accessing the Body’s Wisdom and Creative Intelligence*. The book was intended to reach several groups: Focusers, arts therapists, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and anyone else who was interested. The publisher thought it was a lofty task to market to different groups but she supported the idea, as she saw the value in the subject. It was during the writing of the book, that a coherent theory explaining how the practices I was using in Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy (FOAT) came to me—based on 30 years of trying out Focusing with the expressive arts with many different populations. I remember being surprised at how the theory emerged,

and also deeply satisfied as I wrote it down. Now FOAT had comprehensive theoretical and practice framework.

I learned that a book has a particular way of making an impact. Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy was not well known in the art therapy or expressive arts therapy communities. Focusing was barely known. I asked pioneer and leading arts therapists to endorse the book and asked one of those individuals also to write a Foreword. Introducing them to the book helped to unfold the work further.

Two pioneer art therapists included Focusing-oriented art therapy in their books. In *Introduction to Art Therapy*, pioneer art therapist Judith Rubin (2010) named Focusing-oriented art therapy as a humanistic approach to art therapy. Of course, within myself I knew that my work fit into humanistic therapy, but it was gratifying to read Rubin's professional recognition of it as a theoretical and practice orientation within the art therapy field. Two years later, Cathy Malchiodi (2012) included an excerpt from my book in her *Handbook of Art Therapy* as an example of a mind-body approach to art therapy, and in 2013, Malchiodi included a chapter, "Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy with People Who Have Chronic Illnesses" in her book, *Art Therapy and Healthcare*.

Including Focusing-oriented art therapy in these three books is a major accomplishment for bringing Focusing into a new field. Later, I was invited to submit a proposal for Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy to be included in the special edition on Focusing in the *Journal of Person-Centered Psychotherapy*. I wrote an article on FOAT with trauma, which was later translated into Czechoslovakian and published in an art therapy journal in that country.

In addition to inviting arts therapists to endorse the book, I also sent a copy of the manuscript to Focusing Coordinator and Professor, Akira Ikemi, who also agreed to review the book. After reading it, he oversaw the translation and publication of the book into Japanese. Thus began a series of trainings in Focusing-Oriented Expressive Arts Therapy in Japan and later at the University of Hong Kong, Centre on Behavioural Health. The book was then translated into Korean. One of my chapters, "Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy and Experiential Collage Work: History and Development in Japan" was included in a book, *Art Therapy in Asia* followed by the publication of a second book in Japanese on Focusing and the spirit of art of expressions, coauthored by Akira, Maki Miyake, and myself.

While Focusing-oriented art therapy (FOAT) was becoming known in the profession of art therapy, I also wanted it to become more known in the expressive arts therapies (includes an integration of art, dance, music, drama, poetry, etc.). To those outside of these professions, you may think they are the same or at least similar enough. However, the art therapy professional community and expressive arts therapies profession are quite distinct.

As my work deepened in Focusing-oriented expressive arts, I also felt it had a mindfulness-based orientation. As a mindfulness practitioner, I would say that Focusing-oriented art therapy is not the same as mindfulness, but it has similarities that make them more like cousins. In particular, I feel the *Focusing Attitude* of pausing...bringing awareness to the bodily felt sense, noticing what is there with an attitude of friendly curiosity is very much like mindfulness. In the over 30 years of clinical practice, I could see that when clients

did “Clearing a Space” (taking an inventory of what’s in the way of feeling “all fine” right now, setting the issues at distance outside the body, and sensing the “all fine” place), they were able to access an inherent place of wellbeing and wholeness within themselves—that is similar to qualities and energies accessed through meditation. I have hundreds of drawings of an “All Fine Place” that show images of peace, calm, radiance and light.

Thus, I began to do more presentations and writing about how Focusing-oriented art therapy and Focusing-oriented expressive arts therapy were mindfulness-based approaches. To help Focusing and Focusing-Oriented Arts Therapy become more understood in a larger context, I had the idea of including the crossing of the two in an edited volume on *Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies* (Rappaport, 2014). I sensed my contribution would place FOAT as a mindfulness-based approach among other approaches (e.g. art therapy and mindfulness; dance-therapy and mindfulness; etc.) I am happy to share that the book has just been published. In addition to the chapter I wrote on FOAT in which I compare FOAT to Thich Nhat Hanh’s mindfulness steps for transforming difficult emotions (Hanh, 1991), a former graduate student and FOAT trainee, Emily Tara Weiner, is the first author of a chapter on FOAT with children and adolescents. Emily had the opportunity to teach a Mindfulness and FOAT workshop to teens at the Omega Institute in NY; her chapter is based on the workshop she facilitated there.

Additionally, I was asked to write a chapter on how I use art in research for a new publication, *Art as Research* (McNiff, 2013). I had used Focusing and art in my doctoral research and also used it as a method to help graduate students to find a meaningful topic and to write from an embodied knowing. The chapter, “Trusting the Felt Sense in Art-Based Research” describes and demonstrates crossing Focusing, art, and research.

I share the aforementioned examples to illustrate how writing and publication provide a vehicle for further interaction, carrying the work forward and unfolding in new ways.

Development of a Training Institute

With the publication of *Focusing-Oriented Art Therapy*, it became clear to me that a home was needed to train people in Focusing-oriented expressive arts. Just like Gene’s first book, *Focusing*, a book can only take you so far. The challenge of developing something new is that essentially you are alone as the trainer until you train others who can train others, and so on. I also wanted people to learn FOAT in its depth and not just think it is as simple as creating art, doing creative movement, or expressing a sound from a felt sense. There’s much more to it theoretically and clinically. From that knowing came the vision and steps to create the Focusing and Expressive Arts Institute in Santa Rosa, CA. The institute has worked in collaboration with The Focusing Institute in NY where trainees can become certified as Focusing Professionals or Therapists with a specialization in the expressive arts.

REFLECTIONS TO PASS ALONG

If I can share anything about how this *combinality* of Focusing and other things work, it is really to first notice the stirring of the aliveness within—a felt sense of energy and

meaning. If you listen to your felt sense with an attitude of friendly curiosity, it will unfold, revealing more about itself. The felt sense is available within our experience of everything as well as each particular thing, at any moment. When we bring Focusing to anything, there is a combinality, a synthesis, a creative unfolding. I believe when we combine Focusing with something we love, as I have been doing with the expressive arts and mindfulness, our work evolves into something deeply satisfying and even more than originally imagined. To me, this is powerful and magical!

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HEALING THROUGH NEW WORLD MEDITATION

Lucinda Gray, Ph.D. and David William Truslow

Here is the story of New World Meditation (NWM), the practice that David and I developed by meditating together, Focusing together, and talking endlessly about what was happening. It took root when I started meditating in graduate school more than 30 years ago. Now, through years of practice it has evolved, and we have given it words.

New World Meditation is a merging of Mindfulness and Focusing. Mindfulness is primarily a self-reflective process, simply sitting and watching the mind. Focusing, on the other hand, is a proactive way of self-inquiry that relies on the bodily carried knowing. In New World Meditation the two processes come together to make a powerful tool for emotional healing.

There are two main reasons why this *crossing* works so well. The tools of Focusing help the meditator to make sense of and heal the wounds of the past, which keep coming up in daily practice. The Focuser learns the importance and gains the benefit of daily practice, which accelerates healing by increasing the intensity of our experience of our wounds. Thus we can't ignore their demands for healing and resolution. Self-forgiveness comes with healing, bringing the end of suffering and the wisdom of compassion.

Because I was a seeker on the path, I was blessed to learn both Focusing and meditation at almost the same time in my life. In my graduate training I worked with two professors who had studied with Gene Gendlin, and each had a powerful influence on my life. I studied Focusing as part of a two-year course in Client-Centered Therapy taught by Joe Noel, and I was introduced to Mindfulness practice and encouraged to explore Buddhism by Linda Olsen Weber. When I began learning Focusing with Joe Noel, I was instinctively drawn to it. I took to Focusing immediately and very naturally. I intuitively understood the importance of *bodily carried felt meaning*. I loved the scientific, research-based model that Focusing was rooted in. Linda gently brought Focusing and body work together with an inherent understanding of the role of the body in emotional healing and growth.

When I think of these two wonderful people, I still feel my heart open with gratitude for the gifts that I received from each of them. Later I went to Chicago and met with Gene and Mary McGuire for seminars and a few individual sessions with Gene. Focusing has been an amazing life-changing feast for my deepest self, my soul, as well as my mind and heart.

At the California School of Professional Psychology (CSPP) competition was very intense. Even getting into the school was notoriously difficult. I was proud, and scared, but mostly excited by the wide diversity of thought and teaching that I found there. When I started at CSPP in 1973, I was aware that I needed some way of coping with the anxiety and stress that I was experiencing. I decided to try meditation even before I started school. I was fascinated by the idea that it might bring me to a higher level of consciousness as well as calming me down.

All my life I had been under stress because of the dysfunctional family that I grew up in. I carried a deep sense of anxiety that came out of living in the chaos of an alcoholic home. I have come to understand, through my own therapy and the healing process of New World Meditation, corroborated by my study of today's neuroscience, that this anxiety was hard-wired into the core of my operating system from childhood trauma. Early trauma affects the synaptic patterns in the developing brain of the child in ways that are very difficult to change in later life.

It was a time of major transition for me. I was recently divorced, and a single mother with two small children. There was far more to do than there were hours in the day. Like so many children of alcoholic parents, I needed to feel a sense of control. Starting early every morning I cleaned the house as fast as I could, running from task to task. I was creating this stress as a way of containing my anxiety. I couldn't tolerate leaving a bed unmade or unwashed dishes in the sink. I would race off to school, driving across town in heavy traffic with my heart racing. One morning in the car I had a flash of insight. I realized that it was more important to put myself together than to put the house together, I needed my quiet time of reflecting and relaxing more than I needed to have the beds made.

This insight was a turning point for me. I began to make meditation a priority. I gave myself permission to sit in silence, going within, every morning before facing the intensity of the day. From the beginning I felt more relaxed. Meditation reduced my anxiety and gave me a serene refuge, a home base in my busy life. Regular meditation meant I had to get up long before my children, which wasn't easy. But the daily process was very rewarding from the start. I reached moments of ecstatic bliss even in the early months of my practice. My meditation quickly became a treat to look forward to. There were mornings when I had to choose between eating and meditating, and I chose to meditate—which I found to be the most satisfying way to spend the small amount of time reserved for me.

Without thinking much about what I was doing, I naturally used Focusing as an integral part of my meditation. Looking back, I do remember thinking that I didn't have time to Focus and meditate every morning, so I would notice what I was feeling in my body and sit with it in meditation. I was using the skills of Clearing a Space, as well as felt sensing, as part of my meditation. I knew enough about meditation to know that interruptions and thoughts were an inevitable part of the process, but traditional Mindfulness didn't show me how to cope with them. With Clearing a Space I was able to gently acknowledge and put aside many of the thoughts that came up. When certain thoughts emerged that were loaded with feeling, I flowed into felt sensing and spent more time with them. I wasn't consciously aware of exactly how I was merging them. For years I thought of my "meditation" as a single undifferentiated process.

When I met David 13 years ago, I immediately started talking about Focusing, what it meant to me and how valuable I felt it was. We started practicing Focusing together, and he began reading Gendlin's work. After a while I began inviting him to meditate with me each morning. At first he said he wasn't interested, since he had Focusing. He would go off to read the paper while I sat meditating. Finally, after months, one morning he decided to try it. Then he wanted to know what to do with all the interruptions, the seemingly endless stream of thoughts. Up until then I was teaching him only what I thought of as "meditation". As we continued to sit together, I realized I was doing something far different than traditional

Mindfulness, and not the same as Focusing. In order to teach him, I had to clearly define this new process.

David and I began the long discussions, the slow process of analyzing what was going on, and teasing out the ways that Focusing was working for us in meditation. I began to spend part of my meditation time in deep contemplation, feeling my way into the process itself. It took time, but gradually I started to see how I was weaving the two practices together. As I worked with David and continued my own inner work, I came to appreciate the healing power of this new daily practice.

In 2005 we felt that there were enough well-trained focusing people in the area that we could invite them to come to our home for a gathering and possibly form a Changes group. Fifteen people showed up for that first meeting. We were delighted. All of them were interested in having a Changes group, a place where we could come on a monthly basis. We invited the group to meet at our home each month for an entire Saturday. We spent the mornings in Focusing pairs, and then ate lunch together—where we had fascinating conversations. After lunch we had open discussions, Focusing-oriented-discussions as Beverly Shoenberger called them, emphasizing felt sensing during our interaction. Sometimes we did round-robins, quick Focusing sessions of five or ten minutes, going from pair to pair around the circle. This group became our family of choice. It was so precious to us, truly a wonderful gift.

When we left Los Angeles to move to Costa Rica, we had to leave the group behind. We comforted ourselves knowing that we were moving to Costa Rica for a more peaceful relaxed and quiet life, where we didn't have to work full time and could have the adventure of living abroad. In Costa Rica we found limited resources for Focusing. The Focusing group here was trained in Domain Focusing, and we found that we were like fish out of water. We were not comfortable making a mental decision about what to work on, and we were used to beginning with our body experience in-the-moment. The group was very small, and new people kept coming in all the time. We understood that there was a need to expand the Focusing community here by bringing in these new people, but on a personal level it wasn't right for us.

We wanted to go deeper, as we could only do in a stable group of skilled and experienced focusers who could handle the deep waters. To fill this void we started thinking more profoundly about our daily practice. We lived in a beautiful tree top apartment, where bird songs were the only sound of the morning. It was perfect for meditation. Also, we had the time to think more deeply about Focusing and meditation and how they work together. I began struggling to write down my reflections so I could teach them to others who are deeply in need of healing.

In order to help you understand how David and I have worked this process, we will each share some of our healing story, as well as our thoughts about the process. Obviously there is not sufficient space here for us to tell you everything that occurred, so we have each picked a few short stories and personal reflections in order to give you the *feeling* of how this crossing worked for us.

As you read along you will see that the process evolves into a dialogue between us, about our lives with NWM and Focusing. And so we begin with some very personal stories.

David

I always tried to figure out what was going on in the family, and with my own feelings. I would spend time thinking, trying to understand the different motivations that were driving my mother, stepfather, father and stepmother. At first, of course, I thought everything that went on in the family was my fault. But one day I realized that everybody had his or her own agenda, and it wasn't about me, at all. I was just a pawn that they were using to meet their own needs, and act out their anger at each other. I felt very much alone and isolated in the family drama.

First, I will share with you a little background. My parents divorced when I was two years old. My mother remarried a Mormon attorney when I was six. They were happy together and began having babies right away. I have five half brothers and sisters. I was always very responsible, and my mother leaned on me for support in dealing with all the children. I never got to be a child myself; I was always treated like an adult, and I was expected to meet adult expectations. I was mother's helper, taking far too much responsibility.

I was dyslexic as a child. I didn't learn to read until I was in eleventh grade. In those days very little was known, and even less was understood, about dyslexia and learning disabilities, so the teachers and my parents thought I wasn't trying. I was scolded, put down and criticized for not applying myself, and I became an angry kid. Also I wasn't allowed to see my real father, whom I idealized, except for short stays on school vacations.

Into my adult life I continued trying to mentally figure out why I felt as I did and reacted the way I did in certain relationships. When I started learning Focusing, it was like a miracle in my life. I took to Focusing like a duck to water. In all my struggles it had never occurred to me to look into my body to discover my deeper needs and feelings. In Focusing I discovered a whole new world of bodily carried awareness.

Lucinda

I'm happy to hear you say that. I find that simply sitting with *whatever comes* is so amazingly healing.

When I was a child my parents expected me to go to ballet school three times a week, starting when I was four years old. Of course I tried, and I did very well. But, there were many complications. We were often late. Mother was always in a hurry, she would drive me across town as fast as she could. Too many times we would get caught at the railroad crossing and find that the train was between us and the ballet studio. We had no choice but to wait. So when I arrived at the class I was late, I had to quickly scramble into my leotard, tights and shoes. All the other girls had already warmed up, and I had to figure out what was happening, and hurry to catch up. I hated that part. It was very competitive. Quite often mother would wait with the other mothers in the gallery. I could hear the whispered comments about all the girls, what they were wearing, who was doing it right and who was doing it wrong.

The worst part for me was waiting for mother to pick me up after class when she couldn't stay. I was scared, waiting in the back of that old building in Hollywood, getting cold and chilled as twilight set in, and feeling abandoned, sometimes wondering if she would

ever come. She always showed up, but sometimes I waited half an hour. Over time I came to resent going to class. It was clear to me that in order to be really good at ballet I would have to dedicate myself completely. I felt like I could never have a perfect technique, which of course was the goal. I felt like it was mother's choice rather than my own. My teacher said that if I was a great ballerina, I wouldn't notice that my feet were bleeding. Finally when I was a teenager I decided to quit. My parents were very disappointed. For years I resented having to go to ballet school. But now I see things in a different light.

One morning in meditation a vision came. I saw myself in ballet class struggling to catch up and keep up and be as good as the other girls. But this time I began to realize how much I benefited from this ballet experience. For my parents it was a gift they were giving me. That morning in meditation I saw that this ballet training was the reason I've always been so athletic; I've always loved dance of all kinds and appreciated the arts. Also I realize that ballet school taught me the value of self-discipline, and that insight was very empowering. Now, when I think of ballet school, I remember the fun part too, not just the hassle and the stress, and the too high expectations.

David

I had a really big issue with betrayal in my life, especially in my relationship with my Father. In meditation, this theme of betrayal came up over and over again, loaded with hurt, grief, anger and pain. It was the terrible pain of losing what I thought was my Dad, that is, the Dad I thought he was, or dreamed he was. Over months and months of meditation on this theme, even earlier betrayals started to come to the surface. One that really touched me had to do with my good friend, David Pearson. When I was twelve or thirteen, I went to a Boy Scout meeting one evening, where I saw David. Something happened, I don't remember what it was...maybe his bike was damaged. Anyway, David accused me of damaging his bike. I didn't know anything about it, and I felt betrayed by him when he gathered the whole group of guys around him, and they all decided I that was to blame. When the meeting was adjourned, they came after me, running through the neighborhood. I was never very upset, because I knew the neighborhood well, and I lived on a golf course nearby. I was able to sneak across the golf course and get to my own house, and down into my basement bedroom. I calmed down and started doing my homework. Suddenly the outside entrance opened, and there was David leading the pack. In my meditation I saw the whole incident through new eyes. Suddenly I saw David not just as a friend who betrayed me, but as a kid who was simply trying to fit in with the rest of the guys. Gone was my anger resentment and hurt. I saw him just as I myself once was, only a kid feeling inadequate, and wanting so badly to be part of the group. This profound shift was made possible, I believe, by my many sessions of meditation on my Father's betrayal of me, and trying so hard to understand him.

What made this meditation profound was that my healing now enabled me to feel compassion more generally, for others who have hurt me in the past. This was the beginning of a big change for me. Now, in daily practice, I consciously endeavor to see anyone with whom I am in conflict in the light of their suffering. When I do this I come to compassion and return to love.

Gendlin says that when you have a *felt shift* a myriad of possibilities open, new ways of viewing events of the past in a different light. I love that! It's almost like now I see before

me a whole array of different viewpoints on many things that happened in my life—people who are important to me. It’s like every big shift opens layers and layers of insight into old events. For example, I remembered that incident with David over a year later in meditation after I had a profound Focusing session with Beverly and Lucinda concerning my Dad.

Lucinda

It was wonderful watching you in that session. I saw the discomfort gripping your chest, and I felt admiration for you in your strength to stay with it as long as you did. I thought it was a great session, and I had the feeling that it was Beverly’s and my support that helped you.

I want to talk a little about felt sensing. I have an uneasiness in me when I think of how Focusing works with mindfulness in NWM. Most often, I don’t ask for a handle when a felt sense comes. Its meaning seems to come of its own accord, and I don’t usually have to ask. When something’s important, it just keeps coming back until I get the message. Somehow I feel like I am betraying Focusing when I don’t ask for a handle. But I find I really don’t need to. The felt sense might come back day-after-day or it might take time off for a week or two and then come back again, but when it comes with great intensity I sit with *it*. I don’t have to ask for the deeper meaning—the meaning just comes. I get that “aha, that’s it” feeling. I guess I rely on this *coming back to...* because I practice every day, so I always know it will be there tomorrow.

Ahhh.... Now I see that what I’m talking about here has a lot to do with the everydayness of it. Without the everyday practice, felt senses wouldn’t have this intensity, and they wouldn’t keep coming back. That’s the way it is with every day practice; I just rely on the fact that *it* will return when the time is right. If I can’t resolve the issue today, I know it will come back tomorrow or sometime soon.

David

For me it’s sort of the same; felt senses emerge spontaneously. Things seem to come up in their own time over years of daily practice. There is a kind of gradual peeling away of the many layers of old stuff that I was already familiar with. But with Focusing and meditation I see my life in a different light. Things from my past came up spontaneously as though they were asking for new insight.

THE EVERYDAYNESS OF NEW WORLD MEDITATION

Lucinda

In New World Meditation, I very seldom get up in the morning and say, *I think I’ll work on this or that today*. When I sit to meditate, whatever wants to be known simply comes; it comes in my body with an intensity that demands attention. There is no mental decision involved. I find that I don’t need to ask for a felt sense; they most often just emerge when it is time. It’s like the felt sense comes when it is ready, when I am ready. I don’t need to ask for a handle. It simply comes when I stay present with the felt sense. And maybe, because I am so facile with Focusing, handle—the “what is this” part—comes so quickly and easily.

It seems I can't stay away from the felt sense. If I slip away from the essence, the felt sense will inevitably return when it wants to. It keeps coming back until I let go and allow myself to stay with the felt sense long enough for the crux of its meaning to emerge. Then, often it seems to need still more of this staying-with. And finally I come to a new place of recognition that feels like waking up. When I admit the truth, no matter how painful it is, I see what happened freshly with new eyes. There is a feeling of relief in my body.

WE HEAL IN LAYERS

David

Everything that has happened to us is stored inside in layers. It seems like every betrayal echoes every prior betrayal, so that resolving the current betrayal and coming to self-forgiveness and compassion allows me to see prior injuries in a new light. I feel the many layers gradually coming out. It's as if each one hides beneath the one before and can't come forth until the first one is resolved. By resolved, I mean, I get the message. I realize what happened, I grieve, and I come to peace—self-forgiveness, self-compassion, and return to love. Sometimes it has taken years for these layers to emerge one by one to be healed. I wonder if *staying-with* helps the hidden layers come out more quickly. For you, Lucinda, it seems to go faster.

Lucinda

Maybe that's true. If it is true it's because I've been practicing for so long. The everydayness of meditation makes it very different from Focusing. Focusing is something we usually do whenever we have time, in time we carve out, or in time set aside to work with a partner. Most of us do not do Focusing every day. Meditation on the other hand is daily.

For me daily practice makes all the difference. Meditating every day is far more powerful than meditating once in a while because daily practice inevitably sorts out what is not important, leaving the more serious long-term feelings, issues, and problems. Over time the thoughts and feelings that emerge deepen and become far more emotionally intense. Little by little my defenses fall away, and I discover the feelings deeper inside.

When I meditate every day, the accumulation of clutter in the mind is vastly decreased. Over time many of these distracting superficial thoughts and feelings no longer seem to arise. At least if they do come up, they are so easily set aside that I don't pay much attention to them. From that point on, I begin to feel only what is left; the important feelings, issues and memories that are still unresolved. This is where felt sensing becomes so important.

For example, one day not so long ago I was working in the kitchen. It was in 2008 or 2009, during the crash, when David and I were under terrible financial stress I was feeling very anxious about money and about our future, and suddenly I saw the terrible struggle my parents went through. They were poor, and they worked very hard to provide for us. I saw how hard their lives were, how overworked and discouraged they became. They both died young. Now I have outlived them both.

For the longest time I couldn't find much compassion for them in my heart. It was hard for me to forgive their abuse and neglect, even after their deaths. But in that moment in the

kitchen, feeling my own anxiety and my own struggle, I felt empathy for them for the first time. I felt a flood of compassion in my heart. Not only did I feel compassion for my own suffering, but also a depth of understanding and forgiveness and love that was completely new. Those feelings opened up my heart, and I cried and cried. Finally I saw them as suffering human beings. No longer judging, I was able to see them simply ordinary people doing the best they could.

I don't think these insights could have happened if I hadn't been meditating every day. I love the ancient meditative breathing practice of watching and counting the breaths from 1 to 10 because the practice seems to always keep me in my body. The breathing practice brings the body/mind/wisdom into alignment.

GETTING TO THE BODY MIND WISDOM

For the past twenty-five years or so I have constantly felt my body-voice alive in me, always giving me real time feedback, whether I like it or not. Sometimes I find feelings that I wish were different, but I have learned that if I ignore my inner voice, it is at my own risk. When I override my inner voice, I pay a price for my incongruence, and the price comes in feeling pain inside; I get a felt sense of aloneness, a sort of isolation, which I have come to recognize as self-abandonment.

Here is the part that is personal and sad for me. Self-abandonment was drummed into me as a child. It became my default response. Now I know that it is common among children of alcoholics. When I was little, I constantly had to watch and respond to my parents' moods. Because their moods were so important to my well-being, they became more important than my own. When I think about *all that...* I feel so sad. I have experienced a great deal of suffering through acting out this pattern in my adult life. It took me a long time to reach the point where I was able to be fully aware of the range of my possible choices in the moment, that is, whether or when to choose to take care of someone else's needs or my own.

TEACHING NWM

We have had a variety of experiences in teaching this new practice. First I began teaching it to therapy clients. They were helped immensely, especially those who were very motivated by the desire to more skillfully handle the life crises they faced. The practice intensified their therapy sessions by bringing them more in touch with their felt sense of the issues. The increased intensity sped up their progress.

However, not everyone appreciated NWM. For 25 years I was a member of an ongoing meditation group that was working with very advanced Tibetan visualization techniques, for near and distant healing and for world peace. I very much enjoyed the visualization work we did together, but I couldn't help seeing the unhealed wounds that many carried. In one of our meetings, I guided them through an introductory process of NWM, and they reacted strongly. Several of them attacked me, some saying that I drew them away from the ecstasy of floating in the "ether", and others saying that they didn't want to feel their feelings. In fact, one of them said that getting away from her feelings was the very reason she meditated! I was surprised by the intensity of their response. And while a few others did say that NWM

helped them discovered valuable new insights about issues that were pressing, the majority were definitely shaken up by NWM.

We have been quite successful in teaching NWM to groups that are new to Focusing and meditation. We especially like groups that meet weekly or semi-weekly where we practice together and then share the ways in which the process is working or not working, so we can troubleshoot the problems that arise. We find that people in these groups love meditating together, and especially having me lead them into beginning meditation. They tell us that they feel supported in sustaining their daily practice. David and I plan to offer group training and coaching via the internet so that many people can easily get together. Sharing is very effective because so many of the issues that come up are common to everyone. People love having a space to share the insights they gain.

TO CONCLUDE

We need a meditation practice that we can live with in the same way we live with Focusing, but a practice we do daily, so that the power of the process is deepened and magnified by the frequency and continuity of self-encounter. We have busy lives with families and work we don't want to give up. The discipline of daily practice is difficult to establish and maintain, but it has its own benefits, the most important being that personal power, confidence and resilience are built up within.

NWM is a continuing practice of self-reflection and self-inquiry which aims to help practitioners to return home to their essential self by crossing mindfulness meditation and Focusing practice in a way that brings the body mind wisdom in alignment faster than either Focusing or meditation alone. NWM provides a whole new level of consciousness that we are calling *knowing the Body/Mind Wisdom* which is the direct connection to your authentic self.

We have shared part of our personal story with you in order to show you how NWM enabled us to build a new life that is far more satisfying bringing a level of health, intimacy, friendship and community that we have never experienced before.

Now we can see ourselves in the light of a new and more compassionate reality. I am just as you are. We are all just human beings doing the best we can.

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Our new book, *New World Meditation Focusing—Mindfulness—Healing—Awakening* will be available on Amazon.com early in the New Year 2014

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT WITH FOCUSING THROUGH THE PAUSE: The Merging of Two Worlds

William Hernández & Soti Grafanaki, Ph.D.

*“To see you emerge,
To be with you,
To listen to you,
To tell you that I’m here.
Curious about your blooming, and mine”
(Hernández, 2010, p. 33)*

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about a “journey” of discovery and transformation. Our aim is to share with you the significant “stations”, the obstacles on the way, the “twists and turns” on the path, the unexpected encounters and circumstances that have brought different people to “travel” together, following the same vision: The vision of a human development process that enables people to look for answers and action steps for improving their life, *not only* in the external, material world, but also in their deeper, internal world.

In this paper, we will share a new social development model that has integrated the Natural Pause and Felt Sense Literacy (FSL), as cornerstones of sustainable development efforts. William Hernández, as the Executive Director of FECD (Fideicomiso Ecuatoriano de Cooperación para el Desarrollo), a non-government organization, dedicated to strengthening local capacity and promote sustainable economic, environmental and social development within a framework of equity, has initiated this “journey” of bringing together social development and Focusing. He has created this new model for implementing social development efforts with vulnerable communities in the poorest cantons of Ecuador. Since 2009, FECD has implemented the model presented here in its development projects. Soti Grafanaki, in a serendipitous way, has joined as a “fellow traveler” in this journey after she visited Ecuador last year. She has become a partner in spreading this effort in other parts of the world and studying the impacts of the Pause and FSL on social development projects.

We will summarize the experience of integrating the Natural Pause and FSL in the social development efforts, working principally with groups of rural farmers from the lowest income communities of Ecuador. We will also share the new “places” and possibilities that have appeared on the horizon as the “journey continues”...

William will provide a deeper narrative about what propelled him to integrate FSL in the social development efforts of FECD and share his experience of initiating and implementing the “Literacy of the Pause” in Ecuador. Soti will share her viewpoint as a “participant-observer”, who has witnessed the impact of this crossing during her recent visit in

Ecuador. She will also share the learning that has emerged from co-facilitating with William a number of Pause workshops in Europe.

Our paper will address the role of the Natural Pause in transcending boundaries, removing distinctions created by language, life conditions, education, culture, gender, and in bringing together two worlds: the world of Focusing and the world of social development.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT WITH FOCUSING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD

The Start of the Journey: William's first encounter with Focusing

In 2009, José, my son, was studying in Brockwood in England. A Skype call we had that year became the “starting point” for my journey with Focusing. During that call, José started saying things that seemed strange to me. He talked to me about “getting closer to the truth” and “being the truth”. While he spoke, I could see the tears running down his face and I could hear his voice cracking. “I began to imagine” that something was wrong with him! I told him to “calm down,” and to take things “maturely”. We continued the “conversation”, but certainly, I was not listening. I only wanted to give him advice and guide him so he would not suffer and cry. This used to be the way, I listened to everybody, especially the people that “I loved the most.”

During that call José tried to make me understand that he only wanted to speak the truth and not to say “things” that are not true inside. He was crying and could not speak. At the same time, he was typing to me that he was fine, and there was nothing wrong. He was asking me not to worry. He said that what I was witnessing was part of a body process that he had been working on. I noticed that someone was by his side during our conversation. He or she accompanied him lovingly, in a respectful and attentive silence.

José concluded our call by telling me something that I wrote down, and that I have kept posted up on the bulletin board of my office ever since “...*let yourself be taken by the wind...let yourself be taken, by yourself and by the Universe,...let yourself,...please,...just let yourself...*”

That night I slept like any other night, without anything special occurring. The next morning, when I woke up, I noticed that a special sensitivity had emerged in my entire body, “Far too much” sensitivity to the slightest touch. It felt as if my whole body did not have any skin; therefore it was exposed to the slightest contact that provoked a special sensation, similar to pain. The symptoms were like having a severe congestion or being sick...but *I was not sick*. With some difficulty, I showered, got dressed, and drove to my office. I turned on the car radio, even though I was not accustomed to doing so. I felt something internally, as if asking me to immediately turn off the radio. I did it. I noticed that somebody “little”, like a boy showed up. It was as though he had appeared from behind a wall or a screen. That little one seemed profoundly scared and worried. This special sensation of someone, who was very little and wanted to say something, wanted to announce himself, really caught me by surprise. I remember distinctly having a sense in my body of this little one wanting to be noticed. Instinctively, it provoked me to direct my attention to “that” and talk to *it*...At the

same time, “something in me” was going in circles reminding me to act “normal,” and be careful so the other drivers on the road would not see me “talking to myself.”

Then began a cautious side-by-side dialogue that emerged instinctively, with much care and gentleness, with a selfless and undoubtedly loving curiosity, the kind of loving curiosity you have for someone who had disappeared, had been abandoned, or assumed dead for a long time. A “special” someone who had stayed “frozen” at a specific point in my life, in order to protect itself from those strange challenges and human circumstances that back then, it could not comprehend. I felt a special need to talk to that inner voice that had emerged in the form of a child. I started to take notes of our dialogues, daily records that I have kept until today.

Here it is where the “journey” began of reconnection with my life, with myself, and the world. Here it began my encounter with those “somethings” of my body that were forgotten. This is how it began, my first encounter with Focusing, and its application in my personal life and the business practices and human growth efforts of the organization (FECD), where I was working.

The Beginnings of the Crossing: Learning Focusing & Connecting with my Inner Voice

I continued my discussions with my son, and I shared my experience with him. José explained to me that in Germany he had started working with his body. He suggested to me that I read a book to help me with what I was discovering. The title of the book was *Cure Your Loneliness* in Spanish—and *Healing Your Aloneness* in English (Erika J. Chopich, and Margaret Paul, 1995). I was mainly interested in one page from that book (p. 152), in which a couple of lines referred to the work of Gene Gendlin’s Focusing. I looked on the internet, and I discovered the Focusing Institute. I wrote an email in English to Mary Hendricks. After having sent the email, I noticed that I had written, with certain amount of ease, in a language that, at the time, I did not have much knowledge about. I was a bit puzzled by the way the events were unfolding. Mary Hendricks replied almost immediately and advised me to contact the Focusing Coordinators Edgardo Riveros from Chile or Elena Frezza from Argentina. I could only make contact with Edgardo. He agreed to come to Ecuador to offer us Focusing training.

Edgardo visited Ecuador a number of times over a period of approximately nine months. Together with four colleagues from the management of FECD, and my son, Antonio and his wife, I started my journey of formal Focusing training. Although the training processes were exciting and very beneficial for everyone who participated, there was a sense in me that “something more...” was still missing. The training was intensive and required time to master the theory and practice of Focusing. In this type of training, it was obvious that it would be hard to share in a wider dimension, for example, with the administrative staff, field technicians, and the rural communities we supported in Ecuador. Although the training process was powerful, it was also time-consuming, expensive, and complex. I had a deep inner sense that we needed to find ways to simplify the process, if we wanted to make it more accessible to a larger number of people.

In the same period, I continued the dialogues with my inner voice, discovering with amazement what emerged every time I paused, felt, and listened to *it*. This process was not entirely new to me. It had emerged naturally much earlier, only this time it had academic validation through the formal Focusing training I was receiving from Edgardo Riveros and other teachers of the Focusing community in the United States.

In those first steps, I made attempts to introduce the conventional Focusing workshop to communities that FECD supported. We traveled with Edgardo and other Focusing trainers-in-training to carry out the first workshop with leaders from the rural communities in Esmeraldas. The workshop was beautiful and supported people in getting in touch with their felt sense. People were moved and eager to learn more about how to return to their bodies again and again.

This first workshop lasted for two full days. The training confirmed my previous intuition—that a process of this nature could not be easily applied with a large number of people and communities. I knew after having participated in this process that it was not possible to reach out and support 10,000 new families each year (one of FECD's goals during the past years of its work in social development). The traditional process of learning and teaching Focusing could not be replicated with groups and families with limited opportunities and resources. Something needed to shift if we wanted more people to benefit from the Felt Sense Literacy.

Nevertheless, I continued making a huge effort to offer the traditional Focusing workshop to the leaders of rural communities. I even added individual Focusing sessions one day before the workshop. Sometimes in a day, along with two or three other Focusing trainers, we would listen to thirty or forty people. This practice further confirmed the need to create a simpler process, suitable for sharing with different social groups, in different geographic locations, and with communities who lived in extreme conditions of poverty. There was a need to find a new “pathway” to introduce people to the “Felt Sense”.

The Pause in individual Focusing sessions: The Emergence of the Pathway “to something more...”

In an effort to support people to be with their bodies, we started offering individual Focusing sessions prior to the Focusing workshops. During those sessions, I began by offering my own natural Pause before starting to respond in the traditional Focusing way. I noticed that by starting from my own pause, the Focuser was able to go more swiftly to his or her own body and felt sense. It was obvious to me that pausing at the beginning of the session allowed me to listen with much more agility and flow. From then on, the “something more...” moved and flowed with its own pace, time and intensity. The exchange of words and questions were significantly reduced. It felt like the Natural Pause was doing the work for both of us—the listener and the Focuser. It was naturally supporting deep listening, presence and wider life-altering felt shifts, beyond a specific situation or issue.

It was my observation that by pausing naturally, people hardly needed any guiding. Both the Focuser and listener were a *single complete interaction*. Connecting from the Pause

was creating a different kind of interaction that was less intellectual. There was no room for imagination, intellectual games, analysis or search for a precise “handle” to return to. Past logic and knowledge were reduced to a minimum. The Natural Pause was not dividing people into “different parts”, but was rather enabling a unified, natural, non-directed interior relationship. I was noticing a “carrying forward” movement (Gendlin, 1997; 2004) that was more gentle and less probing.

In one of our later discussions with Mary Hendricks and Gene Gendlin, I mentioned that starting from the Pause was like looking into life as a whole, rather than being bound by one particular event or incident. In this way, the process was more like attending to the whole “sea” of life, rather than only looking into a “specimen” of salty water in a glass. The Pause was offering a “pathway” to connect to the totality of our life situation as experienced in the moment.

The simplicity of the Pause was creating a vision of a new way to interact with each other that was deeper, calmer, more attentive, and natural. This new way of interaction could reduce tensions, overcome barriers created by race, language, education or living conditions, and enable people to connect from their deeper place of humanity. This for me was serving the central objective of any action for social development: human sustainability as the basis for any other type of sustainability.

Focusing through the Pause in the Social Development Projects

It was through these observations and my life experience that “Learning to Focus through the Pause” naturally emerged in the social development and human sustainability efforts. My interaction with people reflected a Natural Pause that allowed me to go to my body directly, waiting and trusting that my responses and actions would naturally arise from *there*. Even in those early years of my Focusing practice, pausing naturally had a very “familiar” sense to it. It did *not* feel like the complicated process that I had first encountered with Focusing. It was a kind of natural, intuitive process that has always been part of my life. I came to realize that pausing, for me, has been present ever since my early childhood as I stuttered, and so in speaking with people I connected to my own pause and responded from there.

In my adulthood, I was re-discovering the deeper, inner-directed meaning of Pausing. I was coming to a new awareness about Pausing and felt sensing. I was gently learning to bring the Focusing process into my life, through steps and instructions. I was also re-discovering, through my Natural Pause, a new way of accessing the felt sense, simply and swiftly.

When I started to integrate the Natural Pause in the way I engaged with a group, something shifted in the structure of the workshop. Something more fluid and easier to follow emerged naturally. Pausing in the presence of a group allowed me to come up with simple exercises that enabled the group to connect with the felt sense, through the experience of naturally Pausing or not-pausing, in the moment. The Pause became the fastest “pathway” to the felt sense without having to ever mention this term.

When we conducted the workshop exercises, people went to their bodies directly. A natural silence and calm generated a larger inner space. This was the moment, when many

realized for the first time, that when we naturally pause, an inner voice can emerge. Some of the leaders, who attended the first Pause workshop, returned back to their communities and actively applied the Natural Pause. People in their families and communities noticed the difference and were inquisitive about knowing what had occurred. “Why do you keep silent?”, “Why you do not fight?” they would ask. The leader would respond, “I have learned to Pause.” In this way the Pause expanded and reached many people beyond the workshop. This is how more people and communities became interested in knowing about “how to pause” and respond from a different inner place.

The structure of the “Pause” workshops emerged naturally in our effort to bring a much richer inner process in the human development efforts. The basic workshop and exercises have retained their essence and structure that organically emerged during my first workshop in the area of Guamote in 2009 with an indigenous group. This initial event has been a significant “station” in my journey to bring Focusing and social development together. Photographs and videos from this first group have been posted in the Focusing Ecuador web site.

Since 2009, “Learning to Listen with Focusing through the Pause” has entered the social development process in a gentle and unexpected way. The Felt Sense Literacy through the Pause became part of the social development efforts and an important point for discussion with Gene and Mary, who became really interested and supportive in knowing more about the work we had been developing in Ecuador.

The power of going into the body naturally and easily through the Pause, interacting with and from the body, motivated me and many community leaders to extend these workshops in many other communities around Ecuador. Most community leaders and organizations with whom we have shared the Pause were interested in bringing the “Literacy of the Pause” to their communities.

In addition to workshops, I took advantage of my daily interaction with people to share the power of the Pause, as a pathway to a deeper and more profound bodily *feel* of an issue or situation. For example during brief, causal encounters I will ask people, after having a little pause, to share the name of their partner or child. This small action of taking a Pause naturally connected people to their felt sense without instructing them to look into their bodies, and the result was that communication and interaction was positively enhanced. The interest of people in discovering what has happened to them in those brief moments of deeper connection was clearly reflected on their faces. Some would be surprised, others naturally calm and pausing, over and over again, and most of them curiously interested in learning more. Most exciting to me was how quickly people noticed that Pausing was a possibility that could benefit their families, communities and organizations. In this way people became interested in learning more about Focusing through the Pause. Since 2009, close to 6,700 leaders from more than 230 organizations have participated in the Pause workshops also known as “Learning to Listen with Focusing through the Pause”.

I was excited to discover that almost every person who had an experience with the Natural Pause talked about the Pause to his/her own family, neighborhood or community. Some of these people, more than a hundred so far, have been trained as “Literacy of the

Pause Educators”. Under their initiative, many communities have formed “Schools of the Pause”, where communities and organizations have developed creative ways to apply the Pause to real life situations, decisions and challenges of everyday living.

From my experience, I have observed that learning to naturally Pause is easier for people *before* they have had any instructions about Focusing or Pausing. People who first learned the Focusing steps or Pausing by instructions eventually could notice and become aware of the Pause, but in a less natural way. For example, they might close their eyes and say, “Ahh...now I’m going to...” or “I will bring my attention to the middle of my body”, and although they would be able to connect with the Pause, the process never seemed to be entirely natural.

Attending to the felt sense through the Pause has been a natural and simple way to introduce people to Felt Sense Literacy. Enabling people to experience the Pause has naturally supported people in speaking from and with their bodies. The Pause has offered new possibilities in our social development efforts by supporting people to widen their perception of the situation and overcome “fixed action patterns” (Hendricks-Gendlin, 2003).

Research data, collected over the last year, indicates that the implementation of the “Literacy of the Pause” in various communities in Ecuador has significantly contributed in reducing community tensions and family and gender violence. Focusing through the Pause combined with environmental, agricultural and economic dimensions appears to positively impact sustainable development efforts that address *both* internal and external changes. Initial findings support the idea that personal and social change emerge through *doable* skills and practices that are taught together with contacting one’s bodily living process from inside. Social and individual development imply and require each other to achieve sustainable changes (Gendlin, 2011). Changes in attitude and behavior through the “Literacy of the Pause” are affecting the levels of productivity, commitment and leadership, as well as transforming social and family relationships in many communities in Ecuador.

Many beautiful testimonies from participants of this process have provided me with the strength to exceed the boundaries of a city or community, or even a country, despite the barriers of language, and to offer the world a simple way of accessing deeper feelings, where peace and always “more...” possible.

EXPANDING HORIZONS: THE LITERACY OF THE PAUSE AS A WORLDWIDE POSSIBILITY

The Role of Pause in Felt Sense Literacy (FSL) Projects

Through the implementation of Focusing in the social development projects, I discovered that the “Literacy of the Pause” can imply and support Felt Sense Literacy in a way that is more readily accessible and understood by all people. In late 2010, when I started my regular meetings with Gene and Mary, I had not yet realized the importance of what we were achieving in Ecuador. For me it was simply a beautiful new possibility for people with fewer opportunities and a way of humanizing the social development process.

Gene and Mary were supportive of my idea to introduce Focusing through the Pause. In their opinion, Literacy of the Pause could be a simple and effective way to expand Felt Sense Literacy and Community Wellness initiatives beyond Ecuador (Gendlin, 2011; Hendricks-Gendlin, 2011). Along with Mary and Gene, we tried to build the Felt Sense Literacy Project for supporting communities around the world to have a fast, direct and profound access to the felt sense. FECD supported this initiative.

Our regular discussions were deepening my conviction that sharing the Pause was not possible through theorizing or talking alone. It was apparent that, as in all experiential processes, people had to notice the distinction between *pausing naturally* and *not-pausing*, or pausing with instructions. Gene's and Mary's presence in this "journey" of trying to implement social development with Focusing crystallized some of the intuitive learnings and supported the possibility for a wider dissemination. Our discussions for the last three years have helped me articulate, concretize, and share my ideas, while creating a sense of security that my work in Ecuador was deeply respecting the most essential element of Focusing, the felt sense.

My discussions with Mary and Gene were invaluable in helping gently expand the horizons of two worlds: The world of social development and the world of Focusing, opening up new possibilities beyond Ecuador. The FSL project initiative was bringing new opportunities and collaborations beyond the communities of my country. It was as part of this FSL initiative that in 2012, Soti Grafanaki visited Ecuador and became a committed partner in bringing the Literacy of the Pause into other parts of the world. In Summer 2013, Soti and I had the opportunity to co-facilitate nine Pause workshops in three different countries in Europe.

In the following sections, Soti will share her experience of joining the "journey" of "Social Development with Focusing through the Pause". She will tell her story as a participant-observer of our work with the rural communities in Ecuador, and share her viewpoint as a "co-traveller" to new "destinations" beyond Ecuador.

Discovering a New World: Soti's experience of starting the "journey"

In summer 2012, Mary Hendricks sent an email invitation to the Focusing community, to participate in a worldwide FSL initiative. I remember feeling excited about the possibility of being involved in such project. Reading Mary's email created this inner sense of "fresh air" entering into my life and "breathing in" new possibilities. I was too excited to wait, and remember writing immediately to Mary and William, indicating my interest in participating in the FSL initiative. In my email, I mentioned a project for homeless youth, which I wanted to support here in my town.

At the time, I was not familiar with William's work in Ecuador. I did not know about the Pause workshops and the massive project he was undertaking to implement Focusing in the social development efforts of his organization. The only thing I knew was that he was familiar with supporting lay people, not just psychologists or other helping professionals, to get in touch with their "felt sense". Our first telephone conversation included a translator

because William was not very fluent with the English language. During our call, I was interested in learning a bit more about his work, and how his experience could support me in teaching Focusing to a group of homeless youth. I remember asking him, “How many workshops do you run with each group?” I was surprised to hear his reply: “Just one 3-hour workshop.” I was just shocked by how this long process of Focusing, with the different levels of training, could be condensed in one, three-hour workshop. This possibility was fascinating, especially because I knew that with homeless youth, it was never certain that they would come back for a second or third workshop.

William’s response had excited me. The possibility of learning how to “teach the essence of Focusing” in only one session was something I could have never thought was possible. I remember asking him, “How much is your fee? How much will you charge to teach me this?” and his reply was, “It is free. But please give it for free too. Just get your ticket, if you can afford it, and come. It will take 5 days. We will organize three workshops for you to see our work, and then you will know.”

I put the phone down fascinated by the possibility of “teaching the essence of Focusing” to a group of homeless youth in only one session. And this is how the preparations began. William was always welcoming and supportive in his emails, making it easier for me to trust the process and arrange for my trip. In October 2012, I visited Ecuador. William and his team, true to his word, had prepared an unforgettable learning experience. We traveled to different parts of the country, from rural communities on the mountains to those by the ocean. We traveled to some of the poorest cantons of Ecuador. I had the opportunity to be with William and his team and to participate and witness first hand, their work in these communities.

The workshops took place in very basic community establishments—places with no heating or special equipment...just simply a room, some chairs and lots of eager people, inquisitive to know who I was and what I was doing there. In those places, far from my comfort zone, in a new environment, surrounded by people who didn’t speak my language and who lived in conditions that I have never lived in, I first encountered William’s work. That was my first contact with the model of “Social development with Focusing through the Pause.” I witnessed how through sharing the Pause, William and his team were supporting individuals and communities in attending to their life challenges in a very different way.

It was fascinating to be part of an experience that I could first feel it in my body, then later, understand in my head, through the words of my translator. Sensing first, experiencing, then understanding helped me be open to what I was witnessing and participating in.

I learned how Focusing was taught through the Pause. Not with special steps, jargon or long sessions. Just with one, 3-hour workshop, offered to a group of 10-50 community leaders, who have come together to “learn how to listen”. During the workshop, William or the facilitator of the group, would offer some simple, experiential exercises that engaged the group in naturally getting in touch with their Pause. Through the exercises people had the chance to experience what comes in the body when they Pause.

People would play together, interact, and engage in simple tasks such as rapidly passing a balloon around the circle, or passing the balloon while looking first into the other

person's eyes. I remember looking into my partner's eyes and experiencing the power of eye contact in helping me naturally slow down, become more caring, less competitive, and more attentive to the other person. It was like I was participating in a human experiment that was allowing me to re-discover how to connect with others without even having to talk or communicate with words. Throughout this workshop, the simple exercises were enabling us to feel our bodies, to respond with and from our bodies, and to notice the distinction between pausing and not pausing. I was deeply moved to see how naturally and simply people were learning about "felt sensing" without this term being mentioned during the workshop. Holding an object and attending to "how does that feel there?" while the facilitator reflected closely, or answering a question, after pausing for a moment, naturally supported people in connecting with their bodies to experience a felt sense. People naturally noticed that the body was providing rich information when they gave *it* time to respond.

It was obvious that each workshop was a new interaction. The order of the exercises, even the variation sometimes, would slightly shift to attend to the needs of the group. The facilitator was always exhibiting good listening and reflecting skills, and, above all, ability to Pause and sense what was emerging in the moment. It was, and still is, really fascinating to experience the power of presence that naturally emerges when the person pauses. On many occasions, I saw William kneel in front of the person and become 100% attentive to what the person was sharing in that moment. William did not always notice what he was doing with his body, but it was very obvious to me that he was not "giving a workshop"; he was fully immersed in the experience of connecting and accompanying what was emerging in the moment. When making a point, he would naturally get off his chair, kneel down, and come to a position in which he could keep at an eye level with those in the room. He was not only pausing, he was supporting the Pause of others through the quality his own presence. It is by observing, witnessing and experiencing this quality of presence that I came to the realization that you cannot simply run the Pause workshops by only reading the exercises and applying them to people. The true essence of the workshop cannot be communicated in what is done, but *how* it is done. This is what I feel makes the process so unique and distinctive. I can recall comparing, how in many Focusing exchanges, I had experienced myself or my companion to be very mechanical in reflecting the inner experience, and not really participating or engaging deeply with what was emerging. I could see how the Focusing process could become mechanical and passive with the listener reflecting, but not really being *in presence*. Being with the Pause was teaching me how to naturally listen and be in presence with another person.

Every group I attended was a mixture of older and younger people, male and female leaders, who had an important role to play in their communities. Participating in the workshop was supporting them to become better "listeners" through re-connecting with and practicing their Pause and learning to naturally attend to what emerges in their bodies. After the workshop these community leaders would take the initiative of sharing what they learned in the workshop with their families, their neighbors and other groups in their community. In those workshops, I learned the simplicity of creating a structure that allows for wider dissemination, and supports communities to continue the process without relying on 'Focusing experts'. I remember sitting in one of the workshops experiencing a sense of awe about how these people can carry out such a task with so little exposure. And yet this is

what they do. Many of these participants have been successful in bringing and talking about the Pause to their communities. Many communities have created the ‘Schools of the Pause’ where you can witness the transformation that has been achieved through the Pause in the way people interact with their loved ones and others in their community.

I had the chance to witness the “work” of such a school in one rural community of Chimborazo. All the women of the community had come together, tired after a long day at the market, but very excited to share with us the new exercises they had developed for the Pause. They role-played real life situations showing how they would respond from a place of Pause and a place of not-Pause. There was a sense of pride and excitement in the room about trying out new ways of responding to common life situations. I sat there amazed by the resilience and creativity of these women, who were demonstrating so much willingness to change their life situations. These women were proving to me that the Pause was making a fundamental difference between violence and non-violence, tension and peace.

During my visit in Ecuador, I had the chance to talk with some facilitators who have emerged from these communities and listen to their testimonials about how Focusing has changed their lives. One of the female facilitators shared, “Focusing has been my medicine that has cured my heart, helped me find my self-respect, and look back into the mirror without feeling ashamed.” She told me, “Learning to Pause made me stronger, helped me stop the vicious circle of aggression and abuse in my family and gain respect among my relatives”. I remember feeling so humbled listening to her testimony. These encounters were changing me inside. I was gently realizing that learning to Pause was offering this new possibility of freeing people from unproductive ways of relating and helping them find new alternatives that can transform the way they feel about themselves and their situation.

When I left Ecuador, I had a sense of having touched something really beautiful and precious. I could not entirely comprehend all that had happened, but I had somehow complete faith that it worked in supporting human development. What I witnessed in Ecuador was not exactly the Focusing process, as we know it. There were no special instructions for attunement, “clearing a space”, finding a “handle” or “asking” questions. There was a deep and focused attention to the foundation of Focusing, the felt sense. From that place all the other steps could naturally flow from an inner-directed movement, rather than an external invitation by the facilitator. The process I had witnessed was much simpler, more playful, and deeply connected to the most essential condition for felt sensing: the ability to Pause, which in its essence is about, “Waiting, and being with what emerges.” In its simplicity, the process felt true to the essence of what Focusing has been for me: a pathway for reconnecting with my humanity and a way for meeting the humanity of another person... “Putting nothing in between” (Gendlin, 1996) .

Pause in Europe: The Journey Continues to New Lands

After coming back from Ecuador, we continued our discussions with William, and I joined the bi-weekly conversations with William and Mary Hendricks. As a participant-observer of the Pause workshops, I shared what I had witnessed in Ecuador and reflected on the new understandings that were emerging about FSL. The Focusing community was

getting quite interested in William's exercises and how to apply them in their own unique context. At the same time there was a sense that the Pause was a very familiar concept that all Focusers knew about.

Actually, I noticed that William was proposing a much more fundamental, much more natural kind of a Pause than the Pause we encountered during Focusing training—one that somebody can experience in their daily life without elaborate instructions, attunements or special places, but in the midst of his/her life. Mary's seminal paper on "The Revolutionary Pause" (2003) gave people a theoretical framework for understanding the Pause as a fundamental condition for felt sensing. But what seemed to become more intriguing for the Focusing community was not the definition and meaning of the Pause, but how William and his team in Ecuador had creatively implemented the Pause through a series of very simple, experiential exercises. Focusing trainers and coordinators from different parts of the world started contacting William to request the exercises he used during the workshops. This interest fuelled more invitations to share the exercises, to write a manual of the process, and to start spreading the work beyond the borders of Ecuador.

Our presentation at the Focusing International in Switzerland was the first European event that I co-facilitated with William. I remember being a little afraid of running a workshop with William, not only worried that we did not speak the same language, but concerned that I did not know well the whole process and order of the exercises. William was supportive, but very apprehensive about my wanting to set a fixed schedule of events during the workshop.

"This is not the way I do things," he told me the night before our presentation. "I never prepare my workshops in advance. I just follow what needs to be done in the moment." Hearing those words I panicked, realizing that I would be offering a workshop to an audience of experienced Focusers without having a concrete plan. Our first workshop together, despite my fears and worries, was beautiful. William was right. We did not need to prepare things; we just needed to trust our Pause and sense how the group was moving along with us. Slowly and gently I learned to overcome my fear by attending to my own quality of presence. Pausing and being connected were important ingredients in helping things unfold naturally.

After Switzerland, we offered eight more workshops in Italy and Malta. Two hundred people attended our presentations. Every workshop was a new experience, a new interaction, a gift of real presence and human connection. Diverse audiences, made up of people from different cultures, languages, vocations, gender and ages, came together to learn 'how to listen through the Pause'. During our European trip we worked with different NGOs, organizational leaders, and communities, including people who knew Focusing and those that had never heard anything about Focusing.

Despite the obvious external differences, many of the participants of our workshops responded in a universal way to the Power of the Pause to bring us right into our bodily felt experience and deeper place of connection with ourselves and others. We witnessed in different countries, contexts and settings, how the simple exercises we use during our Pause workshop were able to perform a little 'miracle', so after two and half or three hours people could look into each others eyes and become deeply moved by the profound simplicity of

learning to accompany another human being with and through the Pause. After the workshop, they were asking for ways to expand and bring the Pause to their ‘world’, creating more opportunities for spreading the Pause and FSL, beyond the boundaries of the workshop.

Bringing the “Literacy of the Pause” to places outside of Ecuador has provided a rich learning experience. It offered the opportunity to see how the Pause actually creates a space for understanding and connection that overcomes language or cultural barriers. Differences can be reduced, and affection and respect for one another can grow naturally.

THE PAUSE AS OUR TEACHER: LESSONS LEARNED

By implementing the Natural Pause in social development efforts in Ecuador and Europe, we have realized—starting with ourselves—that a deeper felt sense cannot form if the person fails to Pause. The Natural Pause provides the swiftest access to the felt sense.

We noticed that by pausing naturally, the fast thought-memory-knowledge process can calm down, become less strident and more accurate, including feeling and thinking in action, at the same time. Pausing can help an individual or a group to conserve and direct their energy in a more precise manner.

The Natural Pause is a space of silence. This special kind of silence is one of the best ways to listen to another human being naturally and not as an applied technique or intervention. Through the Pause, we learn to create space to “accompany the feeling of another”, while being present to our own feelings. We have noticed that mutual eye contact implies a Natural Pause that holds the attention of the other person and help us go directly to our bodies and listen naturally.

We have learned that sharing the Natural Pause with people and communities doesn’t need to be carried out in a special place, away from a person’s everyday reality. The Natural Pause can be performed within the daily interactions. If a person pauses naturally, their context can pause too, as people and their contexts are not separate, but interrelated. In this way, pausing offers a real pathway to reducing violence in the interaction of individuals and generating peace and affection.

When a person pauses, he or she may interact less egocentrically. The Natural Pause allows a new human relationship to flourish, in which “something more...” than the usual and the mechanical may arise. This “something more...” may be more loving and more kind, allowing another type of interaction that is less conflicting, fragmented, greedy and selfish to emerge.

We have witnessed that “life is never locked into a fixated pattern, but people in some situations feel utterly fixated, when they are not in touch with their bodily ongoing life process” (Gendlin, 2011). Pausing allows individuals to be mindfully present when interacting with what is happening around them. Pausing naturally brings people to a place of more awareness of *their now, their moment, their present*, helping them widen their perception of the situation and overcome “fixed action patterns” (Hendricks-Gendlin, 2003).

Like yawning or breathing, the Natural Pause is a deeply personal process, inherent in all human beings. In a sense the Natural Pause is not a process to be taught. It is *already there* as a natural process. However, the workshop brings heightened awareness to this inner resource and allows people to experience the benefits of the Pause.

The Literacy of the Pause has come to humanize the development process and make it more complete. Acting from and with the body makes a fundamental difference in people's development and wellbeing, offering a great possibility for solving disputes and reducing violence in family and social relations in the communities. The Literacy of the Pause can be a driving force for Human development that puts human sustainability, before material sustainability. It can enable people to acknowledge that material wealth is not the most important element for daily cohabitation and wellbeing. Pausing allows us to expand our horizons of perception and action and supports us in increasing the effectiveness of our efforts to improve our life situation. In the end, pausing naturally is "waiting and trusting". In many cultures this is called FAITH.

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