

THE FOLIO

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POTPOURRI

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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

In addition to a hard copy of the Folio we are now able to offer a Kindle edition. To order either — or both! — please go to: <http://www.focusing.org/potpourrifolio2015>

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Each Spring we send out an email to all of you asking for suggestions for a theme for the forthcoming *Folio*, and in response we usually receive a huge variety of stimulating possibilities. Normally, we are able to find a commonality among several of the twenty or so suggestions, enabling us to rub our hands together in delight as we agree between ourselves that we indeed have this year's theme.

This Spring, however, each of your suggestions was quite singular, meaning that we had absolutely no consensus! “*My goodness...*” one of us said, “*this list is like a gigantic potpourri,*” and the other quickly responded, “*Potpourri! Wow!! How about THAT as our theme? We could celebrate the diversity of the passions that Focusing evokes in our community...the profusion of differing ways people carry forward their experiences in Focusing...THAT would be an amazing theme!*”

DONE!! We announced *Potpourri* as our theme and did the usual — put out a call for proposals.

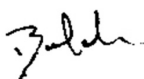
What happened next was a total surprise...and delight! We started getting suggestions — over 50 of them! — for article proposals (a whole lot more than we could possibly print in one edition of the *Folio*). So...we did something that we've never done before — we decided to produce a Part 1 and Part 2, covering the *Potpourri* theme for both the 2015 and 2016 editions. Then with relief for some and disappointment for others, we had to sort out *which authors* would be in this Part 1 and who would have to wait until the 2016 edition Part 2 to see their work in print (Did we mention that almost everyone wanted to be included in the 2015 issue!) Eventually, however (maybe because we all know the wonderful world of Focusing and *being* and *sitting with...*) the roster for the two editions somehow miraculously worked itself out, and we are now able to offer you a very dynamic, very diverse, and very fascinating *Potpourri* of Focusing articles for your reading enjoyment.

In a traditional potpourri, you will find an *assortment* of aromas, textures, and colors that are tossed together without regard to any particular form or order — and so, too, are our articles — artlessly *mêlangé* without regard to subject, arranged only according to the author's last name.

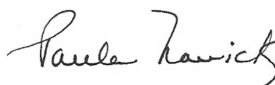
And so...what we are hoping is that you will discover that this potpourri, like all potpourris, offers an accumulating perfume that refreshes our senses and adds a most welcoming atmosphere to the world of Focusing. Welcome to Part 1 of the *Potpourri* edition of the *Folio* and enjoy!

AND...for the first time ever, some of you are reading this edition on a Kindle! Congratulations to the Focusing Institute for your efforts in making this option possible.

With regards from your Editors,



Bala Jaison, Ph.D.



Paula Nowick, Ed. D.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Folio is an ever evolving endeavor, enriched in each subsequent issue by the many people in our community who are dedicated to sharing ideas, techniques, possibilities, theories, personal stories, and, indeed, the latest news from across the globe that inspires so many possible crossings with Focusing. Our article writers can be seen as the ears and eyes of Focusing, bringing back to the community their collective felt-senses of events in the world as sensed deeply from within by hundreds of unique experiences. The efforts of our writers do *more* than inform our community; they *build* a community of ever-questing life-explorers. We Focusers are necessarily a mixed-breed of our species and proud to be so. Probably nothing could illustrate that fact as well as this Potpourri (Part 1) issue of the 2015 *Folio*, whose diversity of viewpoints, attitudes, and styles celebrate our community's innate creativity and freedom.

Guest Editors: Most of our writers used Guest Editors to help them organize and edit their articles, and, as you will read in some of their personal Acknowledgments, the support and encouragement of their Guest Editors made the challenging writing process less arduous than it might have been if they had been alone in their efforts. We, the editors of the *Folio*, also thank the Guest Editors for their careful proofreading. Your help greatly eased much of our editing.

This year twenty-one people volunteered their time and expertise to help make this *Folio* so exceptional. We thank Kyle Arnold, Donna Blank, Abbe Blum, Dominic Barter, Regina Brennan, Ted Cox, Zena Goldenberg, Larry Hurst, Jocelyn Kahn, Mary Elaine Kiener, Joan Klagsbrun, Shirley Loeb, Adele Kehoe McFall, Julian Miller, Judy Moore, Bruce Nayowith, Carol Nickerson, Laury Rappaport, Lillian Sober-Ain, Lisa R.Tucci, and Donna Varnau.

Cover Art: *How*, we wondered, do you illustrate a Potpourri of ideas? Would a picture of bowls of lavender, lemon slices, and pinecones do the trick? “*Absolutely not!*” declared Bala, who dashed off an email to last year’s cover designer, Shay Nowick, who had photoshopped a railroad crossing sign into a wonderful Focusing cover. “*Can you figure out how to illustrate a collection of abstract ideas into a potpourri?*” There was a lot of back and forth between us with a series of possibilities from glass-tilted pitchers, to globes, to rainbows in the sky, and at last, to this final cover, which we think ‘says it all’! Thanks to Shay’s expertise — and patience! — we finally came to a finished product that we are delighted with and hope you will be, too. Thank you again, Shay.

Layout and Design: Every year a magical transformation occurs when we send an attachment of standard-looking Word documents to our designer/typesetter, Carolyn Kasper. Invisible to us, she is not only adjusting the raw copy into professional type, but she is checking for inconsistencies in format, erratic indentations, and a host of minor errors that make the difference between an amateur and professional academic presentation. A few weeks later, we receive back a 100+ page “galley” which show the articles now in a journal-sized

layout, and we get a little excited as we see the outlines of our forthcoming Folio. Our job now is to fine-tooth comb each line to spot the tiniest of errors. For some articles, this will be our eighth or ninth read-through, and we are certain there cannot possibly be one mistake, BUT, inevitably, we find one or two. Carolyn does more magic, and suddenly, there it is: our shiny new Folio 2015.

Technical Support: First, our sincere appreciation to Bill Silverman, our Focusing Institute Webmaster, who sets up our site, and makes ordering the Folio possible in digital form. Next, and a *big first* for us...many thanks to Catherine Torpey, Elizabeth Cantor and Rita Kirsch for arranging our first time ever Kindle edition of the Folio, and special thanks to David Truslow for his encouragement and support in moving this Folio into a Kindle version in the first place. Finally, more thanks to Carolyn Kasper for getting the 2015 Folio in Kindle-ready form. Your efforts will extend the reach of The Folio to many, many people who do not have access to hard copies. THANK YOU!

The Focusing Institute: Without the financial and organizational support of the Focusing Institute, this Folio could not be published. Our sincere gratitude to Director Catherine Torpey and the Board of Directors for all they do to encourage our work.

GEMS GLEANED FROM A FOCUSING BODYWORKER

Anastasia Brencick, MA, LMP

Touch is the oldest form of communication. Our mothers, fathers, and caregivers used touch to convey care, support and love before we could see their faces with our eyes and long before we could form and understand words. Relationships develop from this touch, where the words used from the caregiver accompanies what is already being experienced through touching. I begin with this primary truth, that we first experience and connect with others through the non-verbal communication of touch, so that we might keep this in our awareness as I share with you two topics: what massage and other forms of touch offer the Focusing session and what Focusing offers the massage session.

Drawing from my 18 years in the massage profession, I hope that you, the Focuser, might explore ways in which your Focusing practice can be grounded in using touch for your process, should you have someone available to practice touch-based Focusing in your area. My second and equally important hope is that, if you are a massage therapist or touch-based practitioner who senses the profoundness of using Focusing in your practice, that you feel encouraged to take the next steps to integrate more Focusing in your practice.

I am a social worker-turned-massage therapist. I will always be a social worker, but my calling to help others led me to a more hands-on approach, finding the untapped wealth of healing potential for body, mind, and spirit through the use of my hands. I have witnessed many times over how profound a massage session can be for clients when they shift from reacting to the stressful goings-on of life to becoming receptive to the resting quality and slower pace that touch gives. They shift from reacting to receiving. The transition can be more or less easy or downright difficult. Here is why: what we know about the physiology of the body is that the sympathetic nervous system engages when we are experiencing stress. The sympathetic nervous system keeps our body ready to react to real or perceived threat by taking blood flow away from the limbs and re-routing that flow, making it available for the heart to use, and also by causing shallow breathing and tunnel vision. Touch can change this dynamic: it engages the parasympathetic nervous system, or the body's way of coming in to relaxation, receptivity and healing potential. Blood flows back to the limbs and gut, the breath becomes fuller, making it possible to become aware that the stresses are not all of you, and therefore, where more can be lived besides the stress in front of you.

Focusing can be a most supportive process for massage clients who find *something* in the way of coming in to a state of receptivity. Just being with that *something* cultivates an inward attention during the massage session, so that *something more* can come in that present state. Rather than 'pushing through' or ignoring the cues of the body that are signaling, 'Oh! Can we slow down a minute? I'm not sure about something and I'm having some feelings about it.' We can then invite the client to acknowledge and make further contact with those feelings — compassionately.

WHAT TOUCH OFFERS

Here are a few gems I have gleaned as a Focusing bodyworker:

- an island of safety, as an anchor through touch
- a touchstone to come back to when one feels disconnected or lost in one's inner process
- a tangible place to stay in the space before words
- entrainment, and the ways in which both companion and Focuser co-create a space that offers a deeper connection to presence
- a rich place for metaphor
- a way to prime the pump of presence

I will explain each of these points in more detail. Though I use the term 'companion,' the term also applies to a massage therapist; as well, the term 'Focuser' could also refer to the client.

Island of Safety

During his presentation at the Innovations of Trauma Therapies Conference in 2014, Peter Levine talked about how psychotherapists can support clients who are dealing with trauma by providing moments of 'okayness' that can build into islands of safety. For many of us who suffer from the barrage of unceasing thoughts and a tendency to merge with parts that pull us out of presence, just knowing that in this massage-moment it is possible to experience — that 'things are okay' is a feat in and of itself. Whether we are coming from past deep trauma or are inundated with daily, unremitting stress, we can learn that islands of safety can be built by taking a moment to check-in and sense, that for this one moment: *I am okay, I am here, I can leave the doing and just be*. Using the skilled and listening touch that is available with a Focusing-trained companion or bodyworker, the parasympathetic system is activated, and the client is able to find his or her own island of safety. These are the gems that touch offers.

For some, an island of safety may last a moment, and for others, an island of safety feels like a welcomed respite that could last longer than just moments. Either way, this respite provides a foundation that can be built upon and remembered — in a bodily felt way — to be accessed again and again, ultimately strengthening the clients' ability to *stay in presence*. Once the island of safety is experienced, the process of Focusing will be an organic next step.

Tactile cues coming from the companion's hands help the client literally *feel into* his or her body, providing the massage therapist with an appropriate moment to invite the client to drop down into the bodily felt sense, in order to sense *the more*...clearly a context that is larger and more informative than just stressful thoughts.

The following is an example that perhaps you have experienced: When hard at work and hunched over your computer, someone you trust comes along and starts massaging your shoulders. Up to now the inner critic has been with you, commenting negatively (of course!) on your writing. Suddenly, as you start to *relax into the warm hands of trust*, the Critic begins to cease its input. Maybe you didn't even notice that you had engaged a critical part

until you were able to sense *okayness* — down into your body — through the hands of your trusted friend!

Of course, the goal is not to ignore or make the inner critic go away. At some other time, the inner critic might need our attention fully, and we might learn something new when we Focus on what gets it so activated. The point I want to emphasize here is how touch brings an instant connection back to the body and reminds us that the body is here in the present moment to offer a grounded way of knowing in whatever task we are doing.

A Touchstone

Once islands of safety are established, we can use touch as a touchstone for Focusers who might become disconnected from their body sensing, or who might have gotten lost in their Focusing process. Touch is a way to sense freshly in to the body as the hands of the companion have been supporting and literally holding space for the Focuser.

Another way to describe the idea of having a touchstone in your Focusing process is by using the idea of the foyer. I wrote a previous article about using the metaphor of the foyer and I give sincere thanks for this idea to Nina Joy Lawrence and Pat Omidian, who reported using the concept of the foyer in their work (2011). The foyer is a cultural reference to a place in the house where you receive guests. It is the place where someone can be in your home, but not in the inner areas of the home. The guests are in the house, but not all the way in.

The guests can be metaphor for the many felt senses, and the foyer is the metaphor for a place inside body awareness. The foyer can be considered as the neutral space where the Focuser goes to calm and sort out strong emotions — and to find a place of grounding. The hands from the companion often facilitate the process should the inner feelings become overwhelmed or rather, if the *something in* them that is needing attention feels just as big or bigger than the whole of the Focuser. Coming to the foyer does not dismiss what is happening, or place the issues somewhere else. Rather, the foyer is a resting place that is held by your companion's hands should you need it.

Staying in the Place before Words

It can sometimes be difficult for people to stay present with their felt senses while waiting for something to emerge from that place of wordlessness. Perhaps there can be a sense of *something* coming, but it might be shy, or slow, or need time to form. Touch can be so helpful because the tactile stimulation creates a continuous feedback loop that keeps the Focuser aware of being present in their body and also in the company of another. When a Focuser senses the companion's active engagement just by the warmth of the hands, there can be longer periods of remaining attentive, making it much easier to lie on the massage table patiently and curiously...with all of what is happening...

Sometimes I use my hands to directly touch the place where the Focuser has indicated experiencing discomfort or pain, and has specified that s/he wants me to spend more time in that area. When the area of pain is touched, the Focuser often finds that it's easier to find the 'handle' in describing what is being experienced in that moment. My observation is that my

hands often increase the depth of awareness of the client, thus making *whatever comes* easier to engage with. Then the Focuser has more time to sense in to the space of wordlessness, allowing the right word or image to come. There is less pushing to get to whatever it is that is coming and more ease in being with what is vague. Using touch for staying in the place before words is like watching a child holding the fingers of a guardian as she boldly steps in to the swimming pool. She can go down the first step without holding on to the hands of a helper, or she can grab the fingers of the helper and more steadily go down that first step, still experiencing the thrill of the water, but with the support of someone's physical hands so that she gets cues to find her stability during the descent.

Entrainment

Entrainment is a way to name the energetic rapport between Focuser and companion, especially when touch is used. Entrainment describes the communication of the felt shift that both Focuser and companion feel in the session. Physicist James Oschman has applied some of the research on entrainment to healers, including bodyworkers. In his research into the scientific basis of energy medicine, he described how the phenomenon of entrainment between two people involves "...oscillating electric and magnetic fields, such as those produced by the heart and brain of two individuals, can become coupled or entrained, through direct touch (electrical connection), or biomagnetic interactions, or both" (p.122). So, whether using touch or sitting comfortably in front of each other in Focusing, there is a resonant quality that arises between the two during the session. Heart and brain waves begin oscillating at the same frequency, coming and going throughout the session, in a natural rhythm. "Certainly, for those who use their hands to enhance the functioning of their fellow beings..." Oschman continues, "when allowed to happen without intellectual processing, [entrainment] can give rise to moments of profound insight and deep healing" (p.110).

Oschman's description best reflects the space that is offered both when a massage therapist uses deep listening with his or her hands and when a companion uses his or her skilled hands on a Focuser. I will go a step further and say that in entrainment, the companion begins to receive information that comes from the Focuser non-verbally. To discern whether the companion is picking up a shared felt sense from the Focuser — or from a felt sense coming from inside the companion — she must employ her own Focusing, i.e., checking in to see if this *inner* information is coming from a part of her. We don't really have tools at present in Focusing that have been developed to work with such energies, but I believe that we will in the future. This phenomenon is a whole rich area that massage therapists have already explored among themselves, and one that can be offered to the Focusing community — for further exploration and integration.

Another interesting phenomenon happens within this shared space, coming in and out of entrainment. The skilled touch therapist may feel through his/her hands the felt shift and release that is happening in the client. The therapist at first feels a holding in the skin and tissue, like the pause before a big exhale. Then, at the moment of the felt shift, the tissue changes and feels soft, warm and open. So, the therapist first feels the pause before the felt shift and then the felt shift itself.

A gentle direction as one of the six steps of Focusing (from the www.focusing.org website) can be usefully adapted at the point before the ‘big exhale’ or before the tissue changes: “If you get a quick answer without a shift in the felt sense, just let that kind of answer go by. Return your attention to your body and freshly find the felt sense again. Then ask it again.” The companion will feel that not-yet felt shift with the Focuser. This makes it easier for the companion to know how he or she might be supportive in the Focuser’s process and offer more specifically helpful suggestions.

A Rich Place for Metaphor

“My shoulders are so tight!” says my client. I first ask her if she’d like to spend some time with this feeling, so that we know what is here that needs attention. I place my hands on her shoulders and invite her to sense the quality of tight. “It’s tight like I can’t move, like I’m stuck and I can’t do anything about it”, and then tears fall, and at that moment I feel her tissue soften as she acknowledges how much tension there is in her relationship with her son.

“My ribs won’t move and I’m really finding it difficult to do anything without intense pain,” says another of my clients. I place one hand above and one hand below the rib area that is having the pain and invite her to meet me in the space between my hands. “It’s like they are pieces of driftwood jammed up on the shore, and they don’t have any way to move away from each other.” After spending time with this image, being with it exactly as it is, she found a felt shift and then started breathing slowly and rhythmically, reporting that her ribs were now floating separately and moving away from each other, as if her breath were the incoming tide.

There is a natural ability for the body to speak in metaphor, and an easy conduit for this conversation comes by using massage and touch. Metaphor is such a rich area to explore; using Focusing here would be a natural fit, an extended interchange that supports the client’s desire to know more deeply what is within and how their metaphors shift their discomfort.

Priming the Pump

As a person who uses Focusing in my day-to-day life, I notice that there are times when my grounding techniques don’t really work as well as I’d like them to. My techniques lose their freshness. It feels as if my body got overly used to the way I tended to lead myself into my bodily felt sense, and my old way is not as helpful as before. However, when I went for a walk in the woods, took a paddle board ride out at our beach, or got away for the weekend, these physical activities effectively grounded me or reset *my-presence-button* (for lack of a better term). Using massage and other forms of bodywork can also reset the-presence-button, grounding me and priming the pump for me to be able to turn inward.

Touch helps prime the pump of presence, giving the companion another path to open into the present moment because touch can literally change how we feel in space. Our bodies have proprioceptive cells that help us know where we are physically. When introducing touch to the body, the body takes the opportunity to reassess where it ends and the rest of the world begins. Focusing is greatly facilitated if one can know the outside boundaries one

will be turning inward from. Sometimes we may not be clear about our physical boundaries in space until we have touch to help us know.

In closing, my hope is that you better understand that using touch in Focusing is intriguing and has some new and exciting ways to support one's Focusing process. I also want to encourage bodyworkers/massage therapists to begin using Focusing in practice professionally and personally. There is an emerging desire for our profession to be able to use appropriate, supportive dialogue to accompany massage sessions when there is emotional content. I see Focusing as a way to bring our profession to the forefront of mind/body/spirit integration, offering whole healing for our clients. In a future article I will share why Focusing is the answer to our dilemma and why it will be the gift for our profession to move forward in a fresh, new and more helping way for our clients.

Acknowledgments: A big thank you to my Focusing partner and editor for this article, Abbe Blum. I cherish your never-ending support and encouragement!

Anastasia Brencick, MA, LMP teaches Focusing to bodyworkers and to those who are on a path of self-discovery using therapeutic touch. She teaches internationally and in Seattle and maintains a private practice on beautiful Whidbey Island, Washington. She can be reached at whidbeymassage.ab@gmail.com. For more information including blog posts and video, please visit www.anastasiabrencick.com

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CREATING A PAUSE IN THE SOCIAL FABRIC: The Restorative Process

Diane Couture and Solange St-Pierre

In this article we will give an overview of both the process and restorative system from our experience in working with it since 2010, when we met Dominic Barter, founder of this approach he named “Restorative Circle”. What attracted us initially to this systemic approach to conflict was its egalitarian aspect that allows people to meet beyond roles and functions and without the intervention of “experts” holding any form of structural authority. We learn to work with conflicts by perceiving them as an energy that permeates our interactions. This energy contains a potential that generates progress towards balance and harmony in the community. The restorative process, which is experienced in a sharing circle format, facilitates learning to live with the conflict rather than ignoring it or attempting to delete it or “fix-it-and-finish-it-once-and-for-all”.

We will attempt to illustrate how this process functioned for both of us in a circle where we were involved as actors in the situation. Our understanding of the restorative process is of course strongly influenced by our practice of Focusing because for us, sitting in a circle does not happen without having access to our own experiencing. In addition, for the community, the organization or the group practicing this model, the circle is a time of PAUSE where we can reach the implicit complexity which Gendlin (2004) speaks of. This approach is made possible because we interact from our felt sense, on difficult and sensitive issues as we seek a common understanding that can help us take the next step forward.

THE RESTORATIVE PROCESS

Untreated and/or unrecognized conflict constitutes a restrained energy that may cause fragmentation or exclusion. Conflict is inherent in any community, and it is wise to recognize and honor it in order to be able to access the huge potential contained there: unmet needs, differences in values and visions, and some discomfort due to unequal access to resources and power. When a conflict appears, we assume that there is a “root” cause and that something, somewhere has not yet been named. The conflict is only the symptom, the tip of the iceberg of something that is not going well. The conflict is manifested by an event, which seems significant for a person who cares about it. There is, therefore, a physical place, a time and an action between people (it is the concept of Instance Of Itself (IOFI) elaborated by Gendlin (2004) that we worked with). Anyone in the community may initiate a “Circle”. This person, the so-called “Initiator”, indicates what the event (or “the Act”) consists of and who is involved in it as Author, Receiver and Conflict Community members. These people are listened to individually, or in their respective groups, by one or more “facilitators” who are Conflict Community members designated to accompany the process in a Pre-Circle in order to ascertain the facts from the point of view of each participant. The facilitator will also

listen to the meaning of this event for those involved (emotions, feelings, needs) and ensure both the members' understanding and their commitment to the restorative process and the dialogue process. Anyone invited to participate in a Circle must come of their own consent. The process may appear to be easy, but practice has taught us that this is not the case.

The Circle is the actual meeting of persons affected by the conflict in the presence of facilitators. Research and observation has identified three phases that those gathered tend to pass through. To support the first phase of the Circle, everyone is invited (without obligation) to say how he or she is currently experiencing both the consequences of the subject event and their participation in the Circle. In a second phase everyone looks at (always without obligation to speak) what motivated him or her to act as they did in the course of the event and/or the process that preceded or followed the event. Unmet needs can then be identified. In a third phase (length of time will vary depending on the issues), the group attempts to see what can be done to restore harmony. Commonly members will offer ideas and resources. Participants might also ask for something that would meet their needs. This usually results in some kind of agreement that is recorded and published throughout the community and will later be reviewed in what is called Post-Circle.

SYSTEMIC ASPECT

Before initiating any Circle, we must first recognize ourselves as being part of a community that we are “implied in” (in the sense of folded in) and consciously make the choice to set up a Restorative System within it. All community members are invited to take part in this process as the very establishment of a Restorative System is such a distinctive step that can be viewed as a paradigm-shift. (It is of course in the systemic paradigm where we try to cope with the complexity of the phenomena without isolating the people involved from their environment. A Process Model [Gendlin, 1997] and its application in TAE [2004], seems to us to offer important improvements in this paradigm.) Dominic Barter has been very clear that the Restorative Circles are designed to sustain and serve a community that recognizes itself as such and deepens its sense of itself. The Restorative Circle emerges from a systemic structure and from agreements in which all members of the community have contributed. Each system evolves from what people are learning from their practice, hence, each group is unique in its form.

In our sixty-member Diffusion Focusing Quebec (DFQ), a non-profit organization founded in 2006, we initiated a reflection process. In May 2012, we invited all members of the community to participate in meetings on the quality and depth of our community life based on questions such as: What do we do when we have to make decisions? How do we react to differences of opinion? How do we react to conflict? During these meetings, we discussed themes such as listening, trust, security, and the possibility of a collective response to any conflict. During a Skype conversation with Dominic in June 2012, we reviewed with him the five preconditions for the establishment of a system which he had referred to in Rochester 2010: (1) Reaching a community agreement, including having the support of people who have influence in the community, (2) Identifying a place where meetings can be held, (3) Identifying people who are interested in the approach and who will eventually

want to offer their services as facilitators, (4) Sharing information widely in the community of the restorative system, and (5) Providing open access to the system. After five meetings involving about 15 people, we were able on Oct. 2, 2012 to inform our members of the existence of the new resource — Restorative Circles at DFQ. From there, our efforts were directed toward our co-learning of the process by listening to videos, practicing Pre-Circles, sharing a common understanding of the steps and of the roles, and being in link with the wider Anglophone and Francophone communities via Yahoo groups.

Dominic had suggested to us that people who are interested in the process first work on conflicts between one another, and that's what we did. To understand and integrate a new and somewhat experiential approach, we must live it as a personal experience. So we had to have the courage and dare to open our own conflicts in a circle trusting our personal and collective resources. It took us another year to organize ourselves enough to initiate a first circle.

THE FIRST CIRCLE

In the first Circle, held in our community in four meetings between October 2013 and January 2014, we were concerned as author (Solange) and receiver (Diane). This Circle was quite long (about 11 hours including the Pre-Circles) and we were able to explore in depth various aspects of our relationship while gaining insight into the impact of our interactions on the community. The starting point was a disagreement on our way of setting up the meeting. Some of us (Solange and others) wanted the group to split into pairs in order to practice Pre-Circles, and some (Diane and others) wanted us to stay together.

Transformational aspect of the circle

In the restorative process, we use a DIALOGUE PROCESS based on AN INTENTION TO REACH THE OTHER. In this process a person speaks, and then asks another person to repeat back what was said, and then check inside to see if what the speaker intended to communicate was accurately heard. We listen in order to hear, to be touched by the words of the other, to understand and to be transformed. There is an opening created that may bring something new and, as in the process of Focusing, one cannot know in advance what it will be or where it will lead. The Circle and the process of dialogue are a means for facilitating the living intention to meet and join with others. The Focusing process is alive in each person, as well as in the group as a whole. There is resolution, harmonization, flattening of some difficulties just by the fact that they have been named, viewed and heard by others.

Diane's experience in the Circle

Solange and I are friends and long-time Focusing partners. Two years ago, I became aware that something had changed in our relationship that I couldn't understand. I addressed the subject with others, and in Focusing together attempted to find the right words to describe my feelings — and understand better what I perceived as *something* uncomfortable in our

interactions. My discomfort seemed to be linked with “power”. (The following account will be described in the present tense in order to more accurately convey the feelings I experienced at the time).

At the October meeting, I do not agree with the proposal to split in pairs to practice Pre-Circles. Trying to explain myself I become more emotional and confused. Solange is sticking to her position. Then I realize that we have a conflict, and I suggest that we make a Circle about it. We begin the Circle, and towards the end of the evening Solange says that she refuses to compromise because she perceives “bad faith” on my part. The evening ends that way, and I leave with a great discomfort and a sense of injustice.

A month later in November, we continue the Circle. I say that I disagree with the “bad faith” designation and explain why I do not want to go into pairs. I say that to separate into dyads isolates and creates small groups instead of connecting and consolidating, which it seems to me is the purpose of our group. I also say that my reaction was emotional because I had a strong conflict that was so active and delicate that I did not know how to deal with it. This conflict concerns the relationship between Solange and me. While the conflict about dyads is not a major issue, it brings us inevitably and directly into conflict with each other. Then I tell the Circle about a past trauma where a very influential person in my life abused his power over me in a business partnership which also had some echoes of childhood traumas. This trauma was a turning point in my life, primarily because nobody at the time supported me. Now I’m afraid to relive the same thing with Solange and reopen that “can-of-worms”. Then the Circle participants shift the conversation to something else, and I stay alone with my pain. Then, two participants, who were sensitive to my pain, stand up for me with verbal support. I finally feel completely heard.

Solange also tells her story. We are both struggling with our own old wounds and painful scars. The presence of others allows us to get support. There is still a place inside that hears something of the problem of the other. Some meaning is starting to build inside us. We all leave pretty shaken up. Another month passes.

In December, Solange starts talking about her great release following the circle of November. Then she says she thought about our relationship and put the word “rivalry” on it. I sense what the word evokes for me — it is “assertiveness”. Other participants explore what these two words mean for them in their own experiences. There is no consensus, but we end the evening on a positive note. In January, I realize that I am not at all in the same place emotionally — something has changed. The support and guidance have had a healing effect. Something still remains to be explored, but I want to do it from another starting point. I am concerned about not wanting to take more of the group’s attention with my problem. I feel that reasonable time ends tonight. I could not have worked successfully on this issue in my Focusing partnerships because the process would have lacked the contributions of the others: their presence, their personalities, their compassion, and what they carry within themselves. Following this Circle and without having deliberately made a decision to do so, the relationship between Solange and me transformed. This Circle enabled us to improve the understanding of our relationship. Better collaboration has been established between us. Writing this article is a concretization of that new balance.

Solange's experience in the Circle

For this Circle, I agreed to be named "Author". I could sense the feeling of the strength of my inner position. Rather than looking for a compromise, I decided to go toward this conflict knowing that it concerned some disturbing aspects of my relationship with Diane. In the days following the beginning of that Circle, I felt the anxiety of this risk-taking, and I perceived with more acuity the tensions between Diane and me. (As Diane did, I will speak from here in the present tense.)

A month later, at the beginning of the 2nd meeting of the Circle, I realize that I'm not comfortable with the way the story is being retold. I come back to my initial perception of "bad faith", recalling the sentence where Diane said: "Well, go ahead if you want, but we are going to do something else." This opposition has, in my opinion, a broader sense that needs to be highlighted, and I want to talk about it. I think that opening the possibility of a broader sense brings a movement towards more authenticity in the group. I hear Diane say that she has the memory of an inner impulse wanting to say NO and making her say all sorts of things in order not to enter in the problem. For her, talking about conflicts would require facing the one she is living — with me. She said that she felt a fear of being "belittled." She expresses deep emotions about the issue.

Returning to my own inner space, I explore what it's like for me living in an egalitarian group where I can express my needs as a member, and where I am not in charge of other's needs. I love this "selfish" experience where I can object to another person's request and where I can also request being heard. What I mean by "selfish" is a time when I can give myself permission to claim my rights in the community. Other people in the Circle participate in an exchange on selfishness. Diane stays clearly outside of the group until others address this issue, thereby bringing her back into the Circle with testimonies of their appreciation of who she is. Later in the evening, I admit not having heard the suffering of Diane because I was struggling with my own reaction, which didn't leave room for me to take care of someone else. I say to the Circle that I appreciate that others could hear and respond to the suffering of Diane. At the end of the evening, I feel a huge relief at not having to take care of the needs, concerns and anxieties of "the other" when I myself am in so much need. This great discovery will change an old pattern of childhood. My childhood was such that the needs of others in my family were very great, so great that mine could not be heard. Thus, the context of the Circle provides a missing experience for me. Following this meeting, I write in my journal to further explore the issue of my "reasonable child" situation. I also think back to my relationship with Diane and finally put the word "rivalry" to it.

In December, at the next meeting of the Circle, I want to talk with Diane about the "conflict" underlying our relationship. I ask her to reflect back what I say. I say that, in my thinking, when I wanted to name what I felt between us, the closest word that came to me was "rivalry". I simply want to deposit the word in the group without being attached to it. Following this first movement, Diane advances its reflection. She wants a listening reflection from someone else in the group so that "it does not just become an issue between two people." The key word for her is "assertiveness". The rest of the evening is devoted to an exchange on these two words, the whole group participating in a dialogue where a sense of

balance is already noticeable. We are not totally aware of that yet, but an important threshold has been crossed.

Changes in the collective

At the next meeting the climate of the group is more relaxed. We can build a proposal together. We review the original situation and recognize the importance of Pre-Circles and decide to do Pre-Circles between our meetings in order to focus in the meeting on group processes, circles and conversations. We both also testify to the profound changes in our perceptions of ourselves, of each other and of the group. All members of the group felt that we were in reorganization, and there was a fluid and harmonious functioning. A passage was made towards collaboration.

OUR NEXT STEP

We have been developing programs and projects for our local Focusing community. This particular circle-group, formed for integrating the approach of Restorative Circles in our mode of operation has been developed because we have experienced some very explosive and confusing group episodes. We have learned that conflicts are inevitable and predictable whenever we attempt a group project and are connected to an edge or a “murky zone” that needs to be open for reaching the source from which new steps emerge. While the issues that were put forward may seem minor, they may conceal larger issues because they point toward the *implicit complexity*. Therefore they must be welcomed and examined carefully and with consciousness.

Experiential knowledge is developed through practice and reflective space. In the Focusing community we also have an additional tool, Thinking At the Edge (TAE), which allows us to create new models from the study and observation of a phenomenon over a long period of time. For both of us, our experiences have been accumulating for the past four years. Among the DFQ members, only 15 people were interested in the restorative process and in the creation of a system within the community. Only 7 of us have had the experience of participating in the Circles. However, we can already say that the influence of our work is much wider. We see an interest in our small French circle, and even in the international community of Focusing. Gendlin himself has already expressed interest in the process. He met Dominic Barter in 2012. In a recent conversation, Dominic said to us that this meeting with Gene Gendlin and Mary Hendricks was an important event that allowed him to situate his work beyond the context of restorative justice where it was most known. The time he spent with Gene and Mary reminded him of the humanist roots from which his work emerged. There is a genealogy that makes sense and helps him to understand why and how the restorative process works. He anticipates, in the environment of humanist and experiential psychology, where concepts are developed in relation to process, there will be a new host site for Restorative Circles. He is happy to see crossings between the approaches of Focusing and of Restorative Circles.

We continue to carry forward our integration of the approach. In our apprenticeship group, we have an agreement saying that to become a facilitator of the process, we are committed to living it among ourselves. Each aspiring facilitator must experience at least one Circle in each role: author, receiver, initiator, facilitator and conflict community member. There is no specific order for taking a role. We have however seen that it takes time to get used to this new approach. People mostly show up spontaneously as observers or as members of the community. To get involved as “an actor” is a step that few people are willing to take. We also document and videotape our Circles for our reflexive practice and for possible implementation in the Focusing Institute and wider Focusing community. We hope the interest that people have in the restorative process will assert itself over time. Our intention is to see this practice rooted in each of our working groups because, according to Dominic Barter, “If any group of people come together and start collaborating, living together, working together, then very, very soon there will be an organized response to conflict among them.” We would like this response to be based on our positive experience because we can see that the benefits of this approach are immense, both for those who live it as actors and for the community.

The Restorative Circle is a space of UNDERSTANDING of relationships. According to Krishnamurti: “Action has meaning only in relationship, and without understanding relationship, action on any level will only breed conflict. The understanding of the relationship is infinitely more important than the search for any plan of action.” We feel that *right action* — which in the restorative process means an Agreed Action Plan — emerges from *right understanding* between us. We consider the Action Plan as obvious when the transformation is experienced with a depth that allows the Focusing process to unfold. It is possible, in Gendlin’s words (2004), to see in this plan a “carrying forward” direction that can be perceived by the entire community as “fair”, that is to say in profound agreement with the felt sense of those who developed it.

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THE BODY'S RECOVERY OF SPIRIT:
Transforming Life-Stances and Releasing Bound Energy-Threshold
Events in Wholebody Focusing Oriented Therapy

Glenn Fleisch, Ph.D., LMFT

The purpose of...psychotherapy is to set people free...to help people become free to be aware of and to experience their possibilities...Problems are the outward signs of unused inner possibilities. (R. May, 1981)

The human spirit is made possible only by freedom. Without freedom, there is no spirit; without spirit, no freedom; and without freedom, no self. Spirit has its psychological roots in the individual's inner freedom. (R. May, 1981)

[And] since binding is always in question, what needs to be thought is: is it enslaving, or is it liberating? (Levin, 1988)

[There is a] crying need of the spirit, [a] dream of a complete transformation of the human body... (Levin, 1988)

Therapy is not a matter of doing something to the individual, or of inducing him to do something about himself. It is instead a matter of *freeing* him for normal growth and development. (Rogers, 1942)

Therapeutic change is in part an actual change in the body's tissue...a new and freeing physical energy [that] actually flows in the client's body. (Gendlin, 1996)

Spirit healing is...about *bodilying* the spirits within us...through *resonance* with body spirits [so] that they are released from entrapment...and can circulate freely in our resonant souls. (Wilberg, 2003)

INTRODUCTION

Most of us live with some degree of bound energy and bodily constriction. Often, this bound up quality can be observed and felt in our bodily postures as well as in embodied life-stances (lived attitudes and behaviors toward the world). Once formed, especially as a consequence of early life traumas, these life stances become fixed resulting in repetitive patterns of responding. Over time, these patterns become the background context, forming our primary identity or felt sense of self, and often go unnoticed and remain invisible until a) either life situations call for a new way of responding or b) our inner spirit calls us

toward a freer, more authentic way of living. At those moments, an *impasse* can occur as the forces desiring or needing change are met with an equal or sometimes more powerful pull toward stasis and familiarity, and we come upon the threshold or the edge of our bound and restricted bodily stances and living energy.

To facilitate transformations at the edge of this impasse, Wholebody Focusing (WBF) may use an intervention known as *Threshold Events*:

Here is a brief example: *A client “Sandra” in her 40s, suffered from intense and prolonged emotional and verbal abuse as a child, and complained that her husband treated her abusively. While sharing her concerns, her body would contract, slump over, and her tone became very soft, almost mute — conveying an image of a little girl being scolded, reprimanded, and shamed. After many similar sessions, something else emerged. “I wish I could stand up for myself — but I have never been able to do so, not without a lot of turmoil and anxiety.”*

*Given her expressed desire, I offered and demonstrated the possibility of physically ‘standing up’ to which she agreed. I first guided her into an awareness of her whole body as she stood in her usual contracted postural stance, and after some time, she suddenly became more alive. She first felt her legs, feet, then felt some vibrant energy moving into her upper body. As we followed the movement of energy, **her upper body spontaneously straightened up, her shoulders loosened, breath deepened — then her face turned upward as her eyes became more open and her face softened.** As she Focused on her felt sense of this postural shift, she stated, with a deepened voice: “Wow! This is a whole different sense of self that I’m experiencing. I never thought it possible to feel myself stand taller and straighter, but here it is. I have never felt my legs and feet beneath me, holding me up.” We affirmed the feel of the whole body, inviting her to embody this new postural stance.*

Comment: Notice how the whole body came alive when standing — generating new, vibrant energy from the ground up — and how this life energy transformed her typical postural stance of its own accord. We built on this threshold effect in future sessions to solidify a growing sense of self — with more confidence to stand on her own and to express herself more firmly with her husband. In addition, we were able to retrieve and restore the spirit of her inner child by sensing her anger and defiance in protest of abuse that had been suppressed in order to survive.

As shown in the above example, this WBF process event can be a spontaneous coming forward of new life energy, inner directed movements, and postural shifts. Yet I have found that when clients are stuck or blocked by deeply entrenched patterns and stances, they often need a higher level of active *bodily* participation and *embodied* support to enter into the threshold space. As Gendlin says “*Letting the life-forward energy actually come in the body is the chief purpose of body dream interpretation.*” (2012, p. 2). When we use the whole body in Focusing and therapy, the person’s inner spirit and life energy can begin to flow, forming new life-stances, as well as recovering the spirit of deeply traumatized, wounded selves.

Threshold Events: a WBF process to free bound energy and transform embodied stances

The living body knows how to retrieve and recover its spirit, the innate life energy, inherent power, force and vitality, that pre-existed trauma and is still implicitly functioning regardless of severity of traumatic events or environments. When allowed to do so, the body has the capacity to disclose its life-stance and move us toward *retrieving, recovering and restoring its natural spirit*. The body's remarkable capacity shows itself when we are attentive to *bodily leads*, i.e. gestures, postural stances, voice tonality, movements, sounds etc. that are the body's incipient signs of renewed life energy and movement. These bodily leads function like a "homing instinct" of spirit, bringing us to the exact place, event, situation, where its spirit (energy) was broken or wounded. Thus, the movements, backward and forward, are not linear, but rather circular, or holographic- a going back to retrieve *is* a moving forward toward our wholeness of being.

Threshold Events involve co-creating a ritual space in which we use these movements of the living body as implicit leads toward: 1) that which is showing itself as a bound or fixed place or pattern (a movement *backward*) and 2) letting the energy of the reawakened body open to its new possibilities of moving forward.

Threshold has three meanings, all of which are essential to this process event: 1) *the starting place* — the beginning or opening of a new experience, state or venture, 2) *an entrance* — such as a doorway, sill or passageway, and 3) *the level necessary to produce an effect* — the point at which a stimulus is of sufficient intensity to begin to produce an experiential effect. Thus the characteristic of a *Threshold Event* is that it transpires at the edge or border of an impasse, a bound or stuck place or process, that it is at the verge of a new beginning or different experience, and that this experience is held long enough and with sufficient intensity to generate a noticeable felt effect, a significant or major shift in our bodily stance. Once shifted or opened, a postural stance or bodily schema can reveal memories, scenes where the life-stance of lost or expelled selves were formed, eventually re-awakening and restoring their spirit.

Spirit comes from the Latin *spiritus* 'breath' and is generally referred to as the animating principle or force of life. When I use the term "spirit," I am referring to the bodily felt awareness and experience of 1) *Life force* — the vital force; aliveness; vitality; 2) *Will* — the sense of self; power; agency; and 3) *Enthusiasm* — the energy; joy; passion; love. Spirit is the experiencing of a vital life force and energy, one that transcends our immediate situations, history and previous knowledge. Thus, as Rollo May (1981) states, "Spirit is the breath of life...that which gives vivacity, energy, liveliness, courage and ardor to life (p. 220)." "Spirit is the power of *being*, reaching forward into *becoming*. (Bugental and Bugental, 1984, p. 56)." It is the power and energy of our living spirit that has been stopped, broken or impaired by the life traumas that necessitated it go "underground," or be "exiled."

When our spirit has been broken or violated, its life-energy becomes *closed off* — encapsulated, dispersed, or disembodied — resulting in a deeply *dispirited self*. When we bring awareness to these closed-off and shut-down places, our awareness reawakens their spirit, *reopening* its natal energy and aliveness that had been curtailed or broken.

Creating the threshold: entering the liminal space

Threshold Events come at a point during the journey with clients when they are actively desiring and/or needing to make a major life change — a significant life transition. The character of this change is either one of a *beginning*, wanting to start something new or different — or an *ending*, needing to stop or break away from a situation or pattern. In either case, clients and I often find ourselves stuck or blocked, not wanting to give up yet, nor not willing to journey further, causing a build-up of pressure.

These events are a *relational or interactive process*, in which each person's "move" in the therapeutic "dance" is intertwined with that of the preceding one. There must be bodily felt contact between the therapist and the client — an openness to being mutually affected, to using all of our senses, and to becoming more aware of what is visible (explicit) as well as what is invisible (energy/feeling qualities/ implicit). This awareness is connected to the whole body of the therapist, the whole body of the client, and the whole field "in-between." Like a tuning fork that both receives and transmits energy, this awareness provides a sensitive attunement that awakens the life-energy of the living body. What is often called forth is a response to the need and the *call* of the whole body's implying, one that "inspirits," i.e., brings life to and animates dispirited energy.

We start at the point of the impasse, create a clear threshold or edge, delineate it as a significant crossroad, and then hold the line at this edge until there is a *threshold effect* when something shifts or transforms. Thus, the result of a 'successful' threshold event is that we *cross over*, or *break through*, so that we enter into a different space. On one side of the threshold, the bodily stance can lead us *backward* to a seminal scene where the spirit was broken, and a life-stance formed. It can also move us *forward* to a new capacity and possibility, sometimes both, as this movement is *circular* or *holographic*. We often encounter many *guardians at the threshold*, powerful forces that guard and protect the wounded spirit. These guardians often implore us not to go forward because serious danger lies in pushing ahead. We can also discover helpful guardians, allies, and angels.

Whole Body Focusing at points of blockage: setting up the threshold event

A *Threshold Event* is jointly created. It comes at the stage when there is 1) an active desire or pressing need to make a major life change — whether external and/or internal, 2) a prolonged difficulty generating a lasting change with old patterns tending to repeat, and 3) a despair, discouragement, or frustration, etc. about ever being able to change, yet accompanied by the feeling that change is necessary.

There are several steps here that are crucial in entering into the blocked/stopped process

1. *Moving inward* — connecting with the felt sense of the body as sensed from within.
2. *Moving outward* — allowing the felt sense and bodily energy to flow outwardly, to amplify, animate, to show more of itself in playing out and expressing itself.

3. *Growing awareness of the blockage* — something holding back, stopping the desired change, pulling in the opposite direction, or keeping the process at a standstill.
4. *Use of the felt body for resonance/mimesis*— utilizing the body as an instrument of *resonant attunement* and *mimesis*, (shaping and moving with the energy/feel of clients' body.)
5. *Bodily expression as implicit lead arises* — something emerges at the point of blockage or stuckness — a movement, postural stance, gesture, expression that spontaneously arises.
6. *Pointing out/playing back the gestic lead* — bring the bodily expression to awareness, and check if client is willing to *enter into* and *let show more* of itself.
7. *Letting bodily felt responses form* — the coming forth of *bodily implicit leads* including responses that might fill in what has been missing, needed, being 'called forth.'
8. *Setting the stage for the threshold event* — co-creating the process and inviting the bodily expression to have "center stage," to let come whatever *it* wants to show **or** do.
9. *Ending the event* — coming back to our whole body in grounded presence, returning to our whole sense of self, and inviting the body to integrate what has come.

Brief vignettes of *Threshold Events* in Wholebody Focusing Oriented Therapy:

These vignettes are all taken from my therapy practice. For brevity, I am leaving out most of the reflections, safety invitations, and some of the intervening steps. Please assume that these took place, and that everything that transpired was based on mutual collaboration and felt sense of rightness/agreement by all clients. Also, to protect privacy, not only is some information changed, but these are integrations of more than one client. The essence of each event however is intact.

Vignette #1: How a postural stance retrieves the spirit of a deeply wounded self

*A married woman in her late 30's has been having an affair for about two years, wants to end it, but can't seem to break away. On several occasions, while talking about ending the affair, **her body would shift into a specific posture — arms would cross in front of her chest area, and her chin would lean on her hands.** When it felt right, I called attention to this posture, and wondered if there might be something important that this stance was revealing.*

We set up the process, and as she closed her eyes, what came was, "I see me at 3 years old, standing by the window sill near our front door. My Daddy is leaving — and somehow I know he won't be coming back. Something I did made him go away. And every day after that, for a long time, I would go to that window sill, and rest my head there, wondering if maybe today Daddy would come back. Every time the doorbell rang, I ran to open the door — hoping it was my Daddy."

After sharing this memory, we were both tearful as we could feel that deeply wounded, dispirited little girl, who “came here” through her body stance to show us that she is still looking and waiting for her Daddy. In effect, her young girl had taken a stance of “awaiting or searching for Daddy,” and would not give up until she found him.

This event opened a new pathway, both in our relationship, as she could feel a deepened trust in my care for all of her, and in her development of a more nurturing, caring capacity to this abandoned girl. This event was the portal that enabled us to care for this wounded girl, and help restore her beautiful spirit. Within a short while, she was able to break off the affair, as we continued to work through the pain and grief of this early abandonment.

Vignette #2: How an entrenched life-stance opens and releases

*A male client in his early 50’s had a history of difficulty allowing intimacy in interpersonal relations — often describing his sense of “putting up a wall” between himself and others. As we became closer, we could sense that this wall became thicker. In one particular session, I felt drawn to moving a slight bit closer to B. It was then that we noticed **his whole body tightening, contracting, and he then had an awareness of the felt quality of the wall — with his arms going up into a ‘stop’ position.** I moved back a bit, and asked if B. might be open to staying with this bodily position to sense what emerges. He agreed.*

While standing, I guided us into body awareness. With eyes closed, B. felt his wall as the wall of a bathroom in his childhood home. He then relayed an incident when he was about two or three years old. “I think I was playing with myself, and my mother came in, saw me, and went into a tirade, yelling, berating me,” You terrible boy — you should be ashamed of yourself! Don’t come out until you’re ready to be good.” B. was able to inhabit the felt space of this little body — at first sensing an intense feeling of shame and badness, followed by a feeling of wanting to disappear. Then suddenly and without any deliberate effort, he began to feel a strong quality of rage, something he had never before felt. The words come, “You don’t want me to come out — okay then! I will stay in this bathroom as long as I want — and no one including you can make me come out until I’m ready!”

There were deep tears coming, as B began to embody the power of this assertion. For the first time, he felt the wall as a powerful stance of protest, and as he reclaimed the little boy, he could feel his energy and spirit. As we ended the session, B. noticed that the wall between us was gone, and that his bodily being felt more alive, confident and strong. “It feels like I finally came out of the bathroom. So it seems I won’t need the wall. And I’m also making a vow to that little boy not to abandon him again — ‘I dedicate every day to take care of you.’”

Vignette #3: Letting the body reawaken its youthful spirit

G. (mid 60’s) has lived most of her adult life in a kind of mute, shut down and depressive space. After many years of living in this contracted bodily stance, she feels ready to become more energetic and alive, but keeps getting pulled back to this familiar position.

While she described a recent situation that was very disheartening, I observed that G's shoulders first began to slump (the common dispirited stance), then very slightly began to move in a kind of rolling motion. As my body mimicked this movement, through inward Focusing, I got a resonant sense like something trying to escape or stretch out — struggling for release and freedom. I brought this movement to her attention — and invited her to check and see if she would like to allow more to come. G. readily agreed — as she liked standing and letting her body move.

We both stood up, took some time to bring awareness to the whole body, and then invited the energy of her shoulders to move however they would like. The rolling movement, which started in her shoulders then evolved into a whole body squirming as though she were emerging from a tight fitting outer skin. Together we carefully and gently helped something wriggle out from within this sense of being trapped in something very tight and constrictive. At one point, she had a distinct sense that her body was free of this entrapment. "It feels like my body has shed an old skin — sort of like a snake — and it feels like this new skin is very different. It feels soft, rubbery, loose, warm, and fresh." We continue to move together — which to me felt like birthing this new being into life. "It feels like I am a very young girl — just starting to find her legs, and the environment feels very nurturing and wonderful. This rocking feels very soothing — and us moving together gives this young girl a lot of support and security, something I never felt before. She is moving with ease, and freedom that feels very new."

Discussion: *Threshold Events* as a turning point on the journey — the body leads us Home

As illustrated in these vignettes, our living-body functions as a beacon, lighting and showing the way to re-open and retrieve the wounded or dispirited self. Symptoms and body stances serve as "homing signals" which are our main guides, bringing us to exact places (scenes/events) and revealing the exact ways that the flow of life energy became bound and blocked — and what is/was needed to reawaken the life-spirit and release the bound energy.

It is crucial to keep in mind that each of these events was co-created by the client and therapist, emerging out of Focusing awareness of what the whole body is implying — specifically the calling of bound embodied stances, and new possibilities. Each *Threshold Event* is unique, requiring that we have sufficient devotion, capacity and willingness to enter into and stay bodily engaged in this intimate space. There is a quality of *not-knowing* what will transpire or what will be called forth — a depth of holding, supporting (including physical support/touch), actively participating, and authentically sharing, responding as well as transmitting one's own embodied energy and spirit. These events always occur in the context of a well-established and close relational space between the client and therapist — a space of safety, trust, confidence, openness and authenticity. Clients always know that they have choices: that they should check for the rightness or readiness of any process, that they can always say "no," and that they are free to suggest something or stop a process at any time.

Conclusion: Crossing and returning to the threshold: repetition, circularity and retrieval

Threshold Events are not meant to function as a onetime healing. Although certainly transformational, they must they be returned to again and again — as a *touchstone*, a reference point, a new edge that is then recalled and re-experienced many times. They are more like a “crossing,” a “shifting,” and because these events can shake up our system, there is a strong tendency to return to the more familiar patterns and entrenched life-stances. Thus, we want to keep in mind the phenomenology of *repetition* and *spiraling*, the *circular movement* that revolves around the same themes, patterns, and bodily reactions over and over. Some core aspects include:

1. *The power of the “compulsion to repeat”* patterns and habitual stances.
2. *The continual return to this threshold point* — holding, reworking, reminding, and renewing what transpired until it is more integrated in our body and spirit; a continual commitment to follow this path.
3. *The shifting focal point* — the body wisdom and energy can move us “backward” toward early, wounded places or “forward” toward new capacities and stances. This dual movement requires continual practice, dedication, patience, and often, creating or re-creating new threshold events as the need arises.

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CARRYING FOCUSING FORWARD AND BOTTOM UP

Maria Emanuela Galanti

To Gene, in deep appreciation of his teachings and writings, answering his invitation “please give me trouble like in the old times.”

This is a personal and philosophical assessment of Focusing, followed over time in three stages of its development. In the first stage ('60s–'70s) Gendlin shapes the theoretical model, as presented in “A Theory of Personality Change” (1964). In the second stage ('80s–present) great care is given to the construction and refinement of the teaching method. I argue that in order to develop Focusing further in the current third stage, one needs to strengthen the empirical basis and scientific methods of research, detaching theory and teaching method. Moreover, two (false) assumptions of the first and second stage have to become part of an explicit statement of the vision (and consequent mission of the organization). Furthermore, the empirical content of the teaching method has to emerge through an open attitude to experimentally test out and then eventually discard, several hypotheses of the research.

FIRST STAGE: THE THEORETICAL MODE

In his work “A Theory of Personality Change” (hereafter TPC) Gendlin sets forth a new model or “theory” for accounting for *how* people in psychotherapy change, an explanation that the leading theorists of the time had not successfully formulated. His model consists of 26 definitions and 27 footnotes and chiefly offers a theoretical justification for a simple fact: people in psychotherapy do change!

To me, as a philosopher and reader of Aristotle, the constructive part of TPC, containing the kernel of Gendlin's philosophy of the implicit appears to be a wonderful 20th century extension of Aristotle's views about change in nature to *human situations and processes*. In Aristotle's and Gendlin's philosophy “change” is caused by the passage of something from (implicit) potency to (explicit) act. In addition to that, after having read TPC over and over again (as part of my study program to become a Focusing Trainer with Nicoletta Corsetti in Italy), I have come to the conclusion that a better title for TPC would be “A Theory of Making Progress in Life,” or indeed, “A Theory of Letting Life Go On” because the term “personality” becomes very unclear when human beings are conceived as “processes in interaction with the environment,” as Gendlin has expressed it. Moreover, the term “change” opens the question of whether a model for the “coming into being/awareness of something” can function also as a model for a stable change in behavior, a question that is not sufficiently addressed in TPC.

I must also add that, in my opinion, the philosophy in TPC complicates an argument that is better appreciated in its simplest form. In this form, Gendlin's theory consists of two universal statements, that I will name here as First and Second Law of Experiencing, i.e.:

(EXP LAW1) **By referring directly to experiencing one becomes aware of new meanings.**

(EXP LAW2) **Everyone can always refer directly to experiencing.**

These two statements together logically imply the conclusion that “**Everyone can become aware of new meanings.**” Were they both true, we would then be justified in holding that the people that change (make progress) in psychotherapy do so **because** they become aware of new meanings, relevant to the solution of their problems. Were they both true, Gendlin would have laid down a simple and elegant theoretical model to explain how people go from not being aware of their problems to being aware, and thus capable of changing them, at least in line of principle.

However, because most of what Gendlin says in TPC is a very philosophical and complex reasoning that aims at establishing LAW1 in all its splendor, the reader of TPC is likely to overlook the fact that the universality of LAW2 is a lot more questionable than the plausibility of LAW1. LAW2 is stated quickly in just in two lines, nested inside the definition of the Direct Referent:

This is, of course, a commonplace that can be readily checked by anyone. At any moment he wishes one can refer directly to an inwardly felt datum (...)
One can always refer directly to experiencing. [my emphasis] (1964, p.10).

There is little doubt that by “one” Gendlin means “anyone” or “everyone” rather than “someone.” However, insofar as some but not all the clients who undertake psychotherapy do experience change, the desired conclusion would follow logically from LAW1 and LAW2 even if LAW2 were to be “downgraded” to affirm “some (and only some) people can refer directly to experiencing.” In fact, one may argue (and Gendlin does so, reporting the views of psychotherapists of “whatever orientation”) that people who experience change at the end of a period of time in psychotherapy are exactly those who, at the beginning of it, are able to refer to their feelings and not merely intellectualize, and it is this ability to refer to feelings that is the one *attitude* that carries the promise — *possibility* — of personality change (1964, p.8). I shall go back to a thorough examination of the deceptively simple LAW2 in the next section. Here, suffice it to say, what would suffer most from a downgrading of LAW2 to a particular statement is the applicability of the model to other areas other than psychotherapy, the goal being a further development of the theory of human experiencing in general, as presented in *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*, published two years before.

TPC also comes with an additional critical part in which Gendlin takes issue with the “repression paradigm” and the “content paradigm.” In my opinion, the success of these propositions is very dubious. However, I will explicate Gendlin’s battle against these two paradigms because his battle implicitly contains a model for spreading Focusing outward. According to Gendlin, the repression paradigm is self-contradictory because the awareness of the client is involved in two opposite activities: covering up and then uncovering the difficult material. However, this view of what is involved in repression falls short of giving justice to Anna Freud’s (inherited also by Carl Rogers) notion of “defensive mechanisms,” a construct elaborated just for explaining why the patients are not aware of having repressed anything.

Moreover, Gendlin himself does not tell us what difference, if any, there is between people who are “blocked” *because of the unconscious work of defensive mechanisms* and people who are blocked *because of lack of responsiveness to their implicit meanings*. Isn’t the lack of response a form of defense? Isn’t “denial” the process (mechanism) that blocks responsiveness? What operational definitions or empirical findings may justify a difference between the two constructs? Gendlin does not answer these questions in TPC or — as far as I know — in later writings. This is why the task of showing that the philosophy of the implicit has more empirical content than Freudian theories is a task that still lies ahead of us.

As far as the second battle regarding the content paradigm is concerned (the view that personality is made up of contents rather than processes), the target is elusively stated. In fact, psychoanalysis with its emphasis on *processes* like dreams and free associations does not seem a reasonable target of Gendlin’s criticism. One real reason for Gendlin’s criticism of the theory of personality as contents may have to do with the history of philosophy a lot more than with the history of psychology.

1953 was the year that saw the publication of Wittgenstein’s very influential *Philosophical Investigations*, a book that dissolves *meaning* into the nuances of the ways words are used by speakers. More than 2,000 years after Plato and about 70 years after Frege’s *Sense and Denotation*, philosophers have come a long way to get rid of meanings as unnecessary, metaphysical entities.

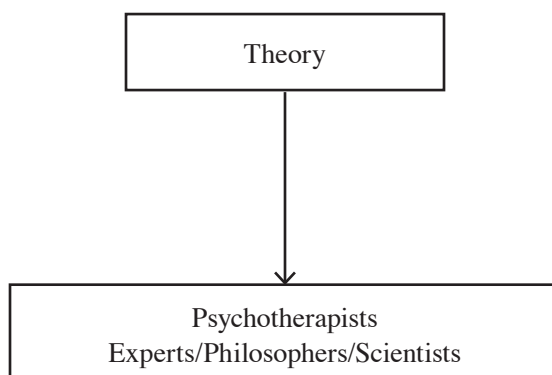
Gendlin’s opposite view, that meanings are “real” and the real power of life, might have led some to label him a “Platonist,” except for the fact that Gendlin distanced his view from Plato’s fixed, stable world of idealized realities. This distancing is accomplished by holding that the emerging of meanings is a concrete process, that is, a bodily felt one, and, indeed, that the concrete emerging of new meanings is all that one needs to explain change.

However, the battle against the above-mentioned paradigms — weak as it is in terms of addressing in depth the open issues in the realm of psychotherapy — becomes much stronger if it is regarded as a strategic move aimed at diffusing the new model. In fact, the criticism of the repression paradigm at the very beginning of TLC makes the new, philosophical model readable by — and palatable to — psychotherapists and counselors sympathetic to Carl Roger’s empiricist paradigms of research and unsympathetic with Freud’s postulating the existence of non-observable entities such as repression and the unconscious.

Likewise, the criticism of the view of personality in term of contents may have been meant to reassure the fellow philosophers. In fact, processes — unlike contents — play a central role in several philosophical views prominent in the ’60s, such as those of Wittgenstein and behaviorism. In fact, Gendlin speaks the language of a behaviorist when he promises further scientific research, as in the following passage.

*Throughout, the new concepts and words defined here are intended to lead to the new and more effective operational variables (...). The operational variables (and there will be many specific ones) which a theoretical concept aids us to isolate and define **are indices of behavior and exactly repeatable procedures** whereby these can be reliably **measured** [my emphasis]. (1964, p. 35).*

Thus, at this stage of development, the model for expanding the reach of Focusing exhibits the following pattern:

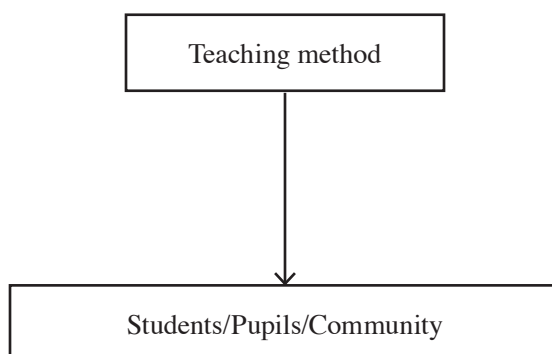


SECOND STAGE: THE TEACHING METHOD

Among the 26 definitions in TPC, definitions 8-11 contain the first sketch of Focusing, which Gendlin defined as the process that ensues when an individual attends to the direct referent, or “felt meaning” (1964, p. 13). By the time *Focusing* was published in 1978, the model had become a method that could be taught “to anyone, in schools, in groups, in parishes and in community centers (2001, p.21).”

The teaching protocol is composed of a sequence of six steps and comes with a full range of suggestions for moving from one step to the other; additional instructions are provided should difficulties and objections arise. Within a few years, the protocols were adapted to experiential psychotherapy and to explorations of creative thinking with “Thinking at the Edge” (TAE) and the Philosophy of the Implicit.

In the '80s and '90s and up to now Focusing has been spread mainly through processes that exhibit the following “up down” pattern:



There is no doubt that this second pattern of diffusion has been successful; as a method of personal growth, the teaching of Focusing — as we all know — has an international reputation and followers in more than 50 countries. However, if we take a look at the original program of TPC as stated in the last citation, we must also admit that it has remained in the so-called ‘backyard’, and I contend that Focusing may have been even more successful had more attention been given to the strengthening of its empirical content.

I believe that there have been two parallel processes that have worked against a more effective diffusion of Focusing if it were supported by scientific research with its operational variables. The first is the growing distance between scientific research itself and Gendlin’s philosophical theories. After TPC, and after *Focusing*, Gendlin’s theories more and more take a metaphysical turn wherein he tries to deduce human experience as arising from one previous stage of development in nature. For example, *A Process Model* (1997) postulates the existence of an initial *One* where body and environment are not yet distinguished and from where everything else originates.

We have seen that in 1964, with TPC, Gendlin had promised “reliably measured” indices of behavior. In 1992 with the article, “The Primacy of the Body, not the Primacy of Perception” (PBNPP), he shows his dissatisfaction with approaches that “torture nature,” a dissatisfaction which extended to all “the scientific construction of the universe.” In this construction, nature consists of objects presented or perceived “before someone,” so that “we humans cannot find ourselves within the scientific picture, since it consists of presenteds” (1992, p.1).

I will not argue here against this reasoning, limiting myself to notice that the distinction between subject and object — object of Gendlin’s criticism in PBNPP — is necessary not only for (Western) science but for Focusing itself. In fact, in Focusing, a human being (a subject) takes her own meaningful sensations as object of attention, in no way differing — at least in this initial step — from a scientist who brings her attention to some other phenomenon in nature.

A second process that may have hindered a wider dissemination of Focusing is the interference between the claims of the theory and the teaching method. In a scientific framework, a teaching method should constitute the testing ground for the theory rather than be a confirmation that the claims of the theory hold in every instance.

In the previous paragraph we have seen that the *theory* of Focusing rests on EXP LAW2:

Everyone can always refer directly to experiencing.

EXP LAW2 spelled out means: **Everyone can at any given moment bring her attention to feeling.**

The teaching of Focusing on the other hand rests on a similar but different premise that is even more basic in its content:

(EXP LAW3) **Everyone can at any given moment feel something.**

While my analysis of the previous paragraph leads me to think that LAW2 is false because there are people that at some moments cannot pay attention to anything, the teaching of Focusing brings on to the foreground the dramatic case of people falsifying LAW3, because they report no sensation. I take Gendlin's own answer to this evident counter instance to the theory as an example of interference. In fact, in the manual *Focusing* (Italian translation, p. 106) he goes on to declare that "the absence of sensations is still a sensation," making clear that neither the model nor the teaching method can acknowledge the existence of "numb" people. All that it can be acknowledged is the existence of people who report (wrongly) to be numb.

In a recent phone course with Ann Weiser Cornell and Gene Gendlin, I have heard Gene give a most interesting suggestion to continue a Focusing session with someone who reports no sensation. He would ask, "It is a comfortable nothing or an uncomfortable one *that you are feeling?*" I have not tried this suggestion yet and will certainly try it. The point I want to make, however, is that in scientific thought we have to learn from the negative cases, that is, the cases that falsify the theory. In order to establish a deeper understanding of those people who report no sensation in a first Focusing session, we may want to ask them to fill out a questionnaire that allows us to, for example, to study statistically the correlation between traumatic events in their life and their lack of sensation. Those findings may lead to additional hypotheses to be tested for the optimal way to teach Focusing to this population.

In general, the Focusing community has to dismiss the assumption that a researcher has to systematically search for the cases that verify a method and exclude experiential (and experimental) conditions that falsify it. In scientific research, a good theory is one that survives several attempts to falsify it, not one that tells us the ideal conditions where it holds in its entirety. We need to apply the teachings of Karl Popper and consider that the goodness of a scientific theory lies in its capacity of being falsifiable by experience rather than verified by it.

THIRD STAGE: VISION, MISSION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

The recent resignation of Eugene Gendlin from the Executive Board of The Focusing Institute of New York both signals and furthers the process of change inside the Focusing Institute. In my opinion, the Institute's efforts to build a grass root organization that promotes the legacy of Gendlin's thought can have success only if it includes efforts to rethink the relationship between theory, method and the empirical basis, between concepts and observations, between vision and mission of the organization.

At this stage an explicit statement of the vision and very ambitious mission of TFI assumes a central role. In the vision of its founder, Focusing constitutes not only a method of personal growth but an evolutionary step in the development of humanity.

I have built a theory with concepts of a new kind that have both logical and experiential connections. With those concepts I am able to build a new

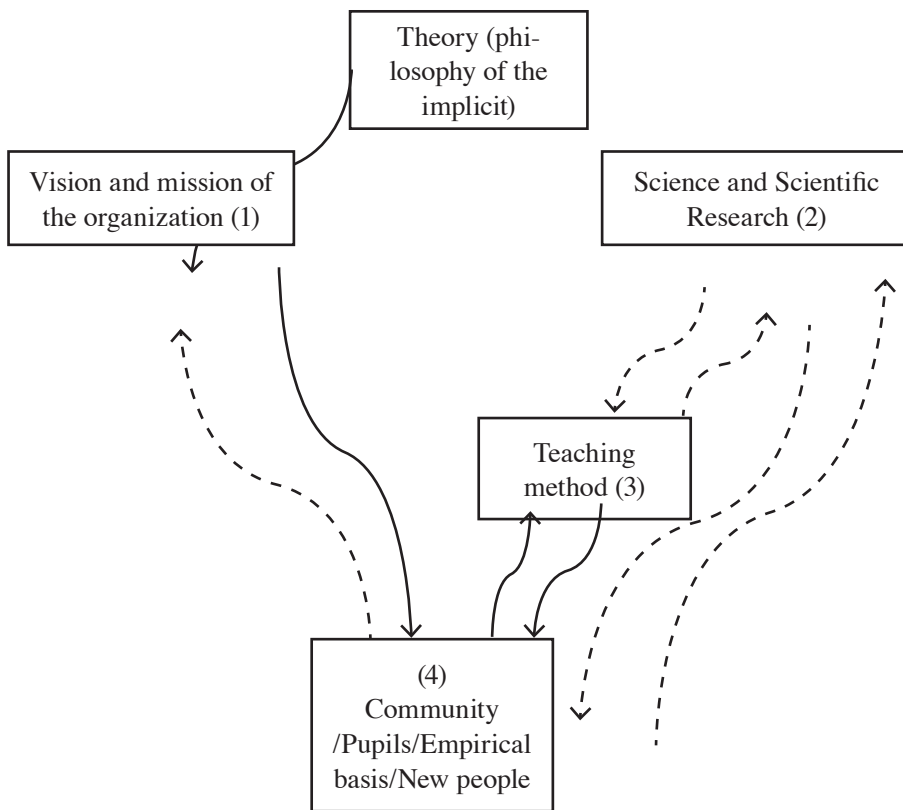
understanding of the physical body as continuous with, and capable of, animal behavior, then of language, and at last of focusing (1996, p. 30).

If we take the above to be a statement of the vision and consequent mission of the organization, it follows that in our vision there is a world where people will universally Focus just as they universally speak. This is a world where the (false) assumption of the theoretical model, EXP LAW2, and the (false) assumption of the teaching method, EXP LAW3, *are true*. In the world that lies *ahead of us*, the two following laws hold:

(Visionary LAW1) **Everyone can at any given moment pay attention to feeling.**

(Visionary LAW2) **Everyone can at any given moment have some sensation (or even “any sensation” because with Focusing we can sense “infinite” possibilities).**

The mission that lies ahead of us is then so huge and magnificent that it can not possibly even start without a new model for spreading Focusing. Such a model must be very flexible and quite complex. The model must be in agreement with science, starting with scientific hypotheses on how a genetic mutation spreads out in a population, beginning from a small group of mutants to finally reaching everyone. In the current stage of development one might envision the practitioners of Focusing as a small group of genetic mutants, not very different from our ancestors with a detached hyoid bone that enabled them to start to speak. Spreading Focusing over a population in this third stage then means being able to demonstrate (through scientific research) that people who practice Focusing are more fit to live happier and more productive lives than people who do not. Only by *demonstrating this ideal/concept* we will be able to reach those who already live well — but could live even better! — if they practiced Focusing. Only by *demonstrating this philosophy* can we reach those who are greatly suffering, including those who, in order not to suffer, have shut themselves in a sense-deprived world. Here, we should be able to prove that Focusing can mitigate suffering and can open sense channels. That is, we need to go to our “negative cases,” for example, people who might have grown up in an environment of poor parenting. There and then, we should test the ability of Focusing to work as a (re)parenting environment. Third, we should test the effectiveness of Focusing to raise self-efficacy in at-risk situations because “self-efficacy” is one of the theoretical constructs that do not belong to Focusing (yet) but one which allows for very simple, experiential measurements based on self-evaluation. In the illustrated model below of spreading Focusing outward, I have used stroked lines to designate influences and relations between different aspects of Focusing that have not been yet widely practiced. On the other hand, I have used continuous lines to designate directions of influence with ongoing and seeded practice.



The most noticeable feature — a novelty perhaps for the community of Focusers — is the absence of any line of influence between the theoretical model and the teaching method, meaning that the teaching method has evolved and is well developed, and should now be set free from the theoretical model — and be more in dialogue with scientific research. One very good reason to free the teaching method from the influences of the theoretical model is that Focusing itself becomes an impossibility if we want to be faithful to an approach where the subject (the Self) cannot have objects of perception. Approaches to Focusing in terms of a “Self in presence” are distant from the Philosophy of the Implicit because every act of presence of the Self implies the existence of “presenceds.” To show the above, i.e. to show that not even Gendlin himself as a teacher of Focusing can avoid reference to perception and its objects, I now put forward an operational definition of “felt sense (of a problem)” from the manual *Focusing* and the *Six Steps* on the web site, that could be Gendlin’s own:

*Sit down in a comfortable place and make sure that you have at least 10 minutes time; Close your eyes; Choose a problem in your life and bring your **attention** to it as a whole; Bring your attention to the **center part of the body** or to where you usually **feel** problems; Wait for at least one minute for a **vague feeling** to appear there (in the center part of your body). This vague feeling is “felt sense.”*

I call this definition “operational” because everyone who understands the instructions can repeat the operations involved in order to find her own felt sense, even if one may wonder whether the term “operational definition” is appropriate for situations where some of the operations are not observable by others — but, of course, so are the mental, mathematical operations of the physicist. The importance of such definitions in the context of teaching is to make clear what terms one assumes to be understood by the students. These terms are here marked **in bold**. The occurrence of the key term **attention** tells us that the teaching of Focusing cannot avoid reference to a faculty that is usually considered a higher faculty of human beings and *one that is strictly correlated to perception*. Thus the teaching of Focusing — contrary to the Philosophy of the Implicit — shares with other disciplines in contemporary psychology, an interest in the study of **attention**, in the study of **recollection**, and in the study of **intentionality**, three theoretical constructs implied in “making a pause” and deliberately paying attention to a problem emerging from the past.

About these three theoretical constructs the Philosophy of the Implicit has nothing to say. In order to see this omission, I would point to Gendlin’s definition of Direct Referent in TPC: *Experiencing, in the mode of being referred to in this way, I term the “direct referent”* (1964, p. 10), thus offering us a circular definition of his main construct, i.e. one where the term to be defined (*Direct Referent*) occurs among the terms that constitute the definition (“being referred to in this way” which simply means “being referred to directly”). The philosopher Gendlin stumbles on a difficulty that the teacher Gendlin would avoid by simply saying: *I term the “direct referent” experiencing when we pay attention to it*.

Coming now to the second important feature of the third model — the lines of influence between scientific research and teaching method, I offer here a short description of an experiment that I have proposed as an activity for the Open Space in the 2014 Weeklong. It consists of making a comparison between two different ways of Focusing. One is the traditional approach, where a problem from the past is addressed through a recollection and with intentionality. In the second method, the Focusers start by choosing a real, concrete object. The purpose of the experiment is to test out whether the second method leads to addressing a problem and whether Focusing is facilitated by the lack of intentionality in the second method. In the experiment, I use a Likert scale to measure intensity and pleasure in the feelings emerged during the two processes. In my vision, such experiments — conducted on a large scale by universities and TFI together — may bring us to simpler, more effective ways to teach Focusing.

Let me close by saying that “carrying Focusing forward and bottom up” can be done only by an empowered Focusing community that finds experiments and scientific research desirable and appropriate.

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LESSONS FROM A FAMILY FOCUSING CIRCLE:

Reflections from The Young and The Young At Heart

Soti Grafanaki

(with the contributions of Raina Barara and Angela Davis)

Over the last three years, a new project has entered my life. It entered gently and offered unexpected gifts and learning about the Focusing process — gems of wisdom that I never thought I would find and definitions of the Focusing process that I did not expect to discover. This paper is about sharing some of these gifts. The gifts of a ‘Family Focusing Circle’ — a little experiment that has grown to be a wonderful example of Community building and wellness.

This experiment emerged from my desire to bring Focusing to my family and create more connection and sense of belonging with other families who were around. This paper shares the voice of two participants (one young and one mature) and the impact that their experiences had on my understanding of Focusing and felt-sense literacy. The narratives provide a glimpse of the power of pausing, Focusing, and felt-sensing in bringing more connection and harmony within and between people, even close family members. They also capture new and more vibrant ways and metaphors to describe and understand key concepts and ideas of the Focusing process.

Felt Sense Through the Eyes of a Child: ‘Writing your life with a light pencil’

Four adults and three children from two different families participated in the ‘Family Focusing Circle.’ During our ‘Family Focusing Circle’ the children demonstrated amazing wisdom in being with their felt sense and bringing a breath of fresh air into the interaction. Each exercise, task, and exchange allowed me to witness how much easier it was to invite the children to be with their felt senses than it was with the adults. The younger members of our group beautifully and with precision were able to attend to their inner process and talk about it during our reflection time. It was amazing to witness how concepts, such as the felt sense, were experienced and understood in a way that was so vibrant and alive.

Raina, my daughter (10 years old at the time) in one of our meetings, offered a very powerful description of the felt-sensing process including the knowledge and relief that comes through following a shift. Here is how she describes getting in touch and spending time with the felt sense, and then noticing how the inner landscape changes when we take a ‘little trip’ inside:

“I remember how one time we had to bring into our memory an important moment that happened during the day and see how it felt inside. What came up for me was a moment earlier that day when we were playing soccer at school.

Our team was losing, and the other team was winning, playing unfairly. I thought I was feeling angry, but when I went inside it did not seem like the right word. I could not find the right word to describe how any part of me was feeling. All I could find was the urge to 'ball my fists'. This was something that captured all I felt. It was so much more than anger."

"With Focusing I have learned to trust my body and listen to what it has to tell me. Focusing is like going inside your body on a boat, and seeing how every different part feels. When I go inside I discover things I did not know at first. Focusing helps me solve my problems. Before I had started Focusing, I would just blurt things out to solve the problem... Once I started Focusing, I took my time to handle and listen to things. It is like instead of using permanent marker, you use a light pencil. With a permanent marker, I can't go and erase what I wrote... but with a light pencil, I can erase and write a different thing, if it doesn't feel right... I can keep erasing and writing new and good feeling things..."

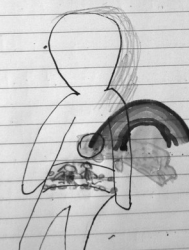
Raina in her words and her vivid metaphor depicted Focusing (and attention to the felt sense) as an ongoing, always shifting process that brings new awareness and allows us to re-author our life in a gentler way. Listening to her reflection allowed me to see that being with the Focuser is not about keeping track of what it 'has been' but what 'is' right now.

Interactive Focusing through the Eyes of a Child: The Rainbow Inside

What do I value about you? This was a question that allowed the members of our Family Focusing Circle to try out their interactive Focusing skills (Klein, 2001). The exchanges were powerful and memorable for all members. The exchanges took place between two members of the same family. Raina, one of the youngest members of the circle, shares her exchange with her dad:

When I did the focusing with daddy, my stomach and chest reacted a lot. At first, my stomach felt like it was full of light and my chest felt like I was touching a soft, woolly and cozy kitten. Then, my emotions changed and so did the feelings in my chest and stomach. My stomach had an image of 2 people, a river with rocks and stones on both sides of it (the river). There were 2 people sitting on the rocks (stones) and dipping their feet in the water. My chest had a little

hole in it. Out of the hole came light. After a few moments, not only was there light, but there was also a ~~rain~~ rainbow and a few light raindrops.



According to Raina, what made this moment so memorable and impactful was that it encouraged better communication and connection: “Listening to my dad in this special way made me feel closer to my dad. My body liked it. This exercise helped me find a rainbow inside. It is not an easy thing to find a rainbow in your chest! It was very special to feel this way about my relationship with my dad’.

Witnessing the impact of Interactive Focusing, I gained new appreciation about the importance of introducing this special way of listening to families and people that share strong bonds between them. In intimate relationships it is hard to simply be the listener and reflect the Focuser’s experience only. Through Interactive Focusing and the ‘double empathic moment’ (Klein, 2001) the listener has also the space to share how the Focuser’s story touches him/her, creating in this way the foundation for mutual understanding and connection. Interactive Focusing invites the listener to feel the Focuser’s internal frame of reference and let an empathic response emerge from that body-sense. In all Focusing exchanges that day, even bitter truths were delivered with respect and gentleness, building the foundation for better communication and connection amongst family members.

Through the Eyes of the Adult: Comfort in Being Together

Bringing families together to learn something about the felt sense and Focusing supported community building and dialogue among family members. The meetings also encouraged rapport-building within and between families. Pausing, grounding, slowing down, sharing and listening promoted a new way of relating. Focusing gave us permission to be together, but differently.

Focusing also encouraged us to slow down and listen to and from our hearts. The tasks were not as important as being together in an open and fully engaged way. Angela, one of the adults of our Focusing Circle, shares in her narrative below, the comfort that comes from being together in a Focusing way:

“We are sitting together in an informal circle — people in various seats, reclining, sitting straight, lounging, bouncy, calm, agitated, bubbly: a group in motion. There is a special energy, from the youngest 6 to the oldest 65, responding to something within themselves or another member or the whole group. Who can tell? The energy is strong as we follow the prompts from a chosen speaker. It could have been an attunement, a retelling of what the member experienced, or their drawing.

This time it was a drawing of a large tree on buff newsprint covering the area in the centre of our circle. Each face is precious, alive and attentive. I feel attuned to our own entrained heartbeats, organically beating together. The conversation is electric with what is happening. The electricity is mostly seen in members’ faces, sometimes in their drawing or writing. I can see members connecting, listening, watching and also withdrawing and working hard

interiorly. Each contributed a piece to the drawing and others said what they saw in it. It felt very satisfying to see ourselves projected on that large tree.

I think a tree is included as a good symbol for our group. Our attunements often speak about our “shy animal” being with a tree or forest our safe place has a tree or trees; our Focusing sessions have been outdoors, surrounded by trees. Since we have met for nearly two years, and we are in close family relations, our time together is spent as intimate friends with shifting roles, making it always new and surprising. These experiences together would not exist without Focusing.”

Family Focusing: Building community and connection

Participating and witnessing the way children and adults came together in the same Focusing circle expanded my horizons of understanding about how Focusing can be introduced to different age groups. Having young children learn about the felt-sense and participating actively in the activities and discussions, along with their parents and/or grandparents, consolidated my belief that children can bring a breath of fresh air in the process. We do not only help them learn, they become our teachers as well. Their lives and our lives are inter-connectedly enriched by our interactions. Multi-generational groups provide a much more fertile ground for new ideas, new ways of expression to emerge. Having children around helps us ground ourselves and also keeps the process simple, without unnecessary frills and intellectual explanations. Our multi-generational meetings taught me that Focusing has the power to reduce power-imbalances between the young and the old and provide the opportunity for each person to be an equal in the interaction.

Having started this experiment with two unrelated families helped me see the power of Family Focusing in building community wellness and connection. One of the most important outcomes of learning about Focusing and felt sense as part of a family group is that we learned together, we grew together, and we built understanding and connection with ourselves and those around us. Creating a Family Focusing Circle offered my family and the other family involved the opportunity to pause and relate differently to each other. Family Focusing gatherings allowed us to experience time differently. As Raina said, at the end of one of our Family Focusing gatherings: “When we are Focusing, the outside time passes so quickly while inside the time passes slowly and gently.” It is through that gentleness and slowing down that we have learned to listen more carefully to our hearts and to those close to our hearts.

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MAKING FOCUSING MORE POWERFUL: How Focusing-Oriented Realities Help Us Experience the Larger System

Elfie Hinterkopf, Ph.D. and David C. Young, LCSW

Eugene Gendlin refers to The Larger System in the first edition of *Focusing* (1979), where he sets a foundation in a quote beloved by many Focusers. “Your physically felt body...is part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people — in fact, the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is [your] body as it is felt from the inside.” (p. 77)

Here we see the complex relationship between ourselves, Focusing, and The Larger System, and how The Larger System is already involved in our felt sensing. Gendlin’s quote is beautifully written, but how can we experience The Larger System, especially when we’re stuck, dissociated, or in turmoil? How can we engage with more than what occurs during our usual Focusing?

We have found that we can powerfully engage The Larger System through experiencing what we call Focusing-Oriented Realities. They include, but are not limited to:

- Grounding in our physical here-and-now
- Centering in our embodied selves
- Bringing in something of beauty
- Hoping
- Bonding with a beloved
- Forgiving ourselves and others
- Loving
- Experiencing something vast and greater than ourselves
- Balancing suffering, fears, and grieving with hope, purpose, and meaning

This paper will show how Focusing-Oriented Realities give us powerful doorways into The Larger System. We’d also like to show how Realities work in ways that are both distinct from, and an expansion of, the usual ways many people do Focusing.

The Realities are distinct from traditional Focusing in that we can invite these powerful, meaningful Realities physically into our Focusing. We then allow them to carry us and our issues forward. We experience these Realities as if they are Focusing *with* us and our felt senses. What is then created is a three-way Focusing process where often the “*I* that is Focusing” and the felt sense deliberately pause to open themselves to these Realities, letting them do their work *in us*.

These Realities are an expansion of Focusing because they are used in Focusing-Oriented ways. At every step we resonate their work with our felt sense, checking for bodily rightness.

This paper begins with a series of sessions using the Reality of loving, which led Elfie to experience the healing of The Larger System. Next, we describe and give examples of each Reality. Then Dave presents Process Qualities through which The Larger System reveals itself.

ELFIE'S EXAMPLE

Here I describe, in the first person, a series of Focusing sessions where I used the Focusing-Oriented Reality of loving to restore a missing part of this Reality in myself.

As background information, I have spent years Focusing on forgiving my parents. I experienced a great deal of hurt from my parents. Feelings other than love were not accepted, and shutting off my other feelings resulted in my feeling disconnected from a large part of my experience. My mother repeatedly made certain promises, but then did not keep them. Using regular Focusing, I felt a great relief when I reached a point where I was able to forgive my mother enough to make plans to visit her grave in a valley near Innsbruck, Austria.

When Dave first talked about the Reality of loving, I thought that I didn't need to Focus on that Reality. My husband and I loved each other, I was able to love most people as they were, and I often experienced God's love.

Then one day, as I tried to experience the Reality of loving as coming from my parents, I realized that I was having serious difficulties. Initially, I thought that these difficulties had something to do with my parents loving me so conditionally.

In the first Focusing session with Dave, I wanted to experience loving as coming from my father and mother. Knowing that love "must be there," I opened to its presence. As I Focused, I became aware of a block to receiving their love. I experienced this block as a felt image of a big cement block in front of my body that kept me from going forward.

As I stayed with the block, I was surprised when a memory surfaced — a psychologist telling me with certainty that my mother and father could not have loved me because of the way they treated me. For forty years I had simply believed that his statement was the truth.

I stayed with this memory in the context of the Reality of loving and was able to notice this mistaken belief, and release it. As this process was happening, a feeling arose that I needed to change the name of this Reality to "the essence of loving." I realized that a person's expression of love could not be perfect, yet if the intention to love was present, the essence of loving was there. As this realization formed, the block disappeared. I experienced loving as a felt image of being held by a large bowl that supported my whole being. I could let go and *deeply* relax into the support of the bowl.

At the session's end I paused and sensed that something was still incomplete. But restoring "the essence of loving" in my body helped my process move in a powerful way. Experiencing the essence of loving from my parents healed this diminished place in me.

In a second session with Dave, I Focused on the "essence of loving" as coming from my father. He had been cold and distant. Many of his choices suggested that he valued money above loving his children. As I Focused, a sense of his life's struggles came to me. I realized more fully how his fears about money developed from almost starving to death during the Great Inflation following World War I in Germany. He arrived in Chicago the day before the 1929 Stock Market Crash, not knowing a word of English. His first job was building large cabinets for a famous museum. While he completed the work, his boss was killed by the Mafia, and he was never paid.

In earlier Focusing sessions, I had experienced some empathy for my father. But this time, as I stayed open to the love that I knew must be present, my empathy was more deeply felt. I could experience the essence of loving from my father. Then I remembered something he said to me — how he worked so hard so he could leave something for his children.

There was a felt shift in me. Before, I thought that it was only money he cared about. Now I experienced how money was his way of showing love. I felt his loving as a round, warm, yellow light with a center in it, and I experienced the feeling at the center of myself.

In the third Focusing session, I wanted to experience my mother's love more deeply. I Focused on the remaining block to her love. She was unable to love me as a separate and different person. As I accepted that her loving was not perfect, I could feel the essence of her loving come into me. Experiencing my mother's love this way, the block slowly melted away. As it melted, I experienced many times when my mother showed her love. She was always in the kitchen waiting for me when I came home from school. She fixed milk with cinnamon toast, we sat down together, and she asked me about my day.

After those three sessions, I experienced the essence of loving as an infinite, warm, yellow light surrounding me, coming into and through me, and flowing back out into the world. The feeling was life-giving and vast. I felt myself deeply experiencing The Larger System at work in me. I had not expected this profound shift. Focusing on the Reality of the essence of loving brought The Larger System to me as a gift.

FOCUSING-ORIENTED REALITIES WITH EXAMPLES

We use these descriptions with both Focusing and therapy clients, with individuals as well as groups. In practice we do not necessarily use all the Realities, nor do we always offer them in the same order.

With each Reality we must pause, be still, and bring our attention gently into our bodies. We let ourselves go into a state of receptivity, opening ourselves up to whatever comes. What comes may be resisting, blocking, demanding, or distorting. We need to discern, but not push away, what brings feelings of being more small, tense, and dull from what is life giving and brings easing (Hinterkopf, 2015). Our usual Focusing responses help us gently

accept what comes without falling into it. The new step may be a few words, a phrase, a melody or song, or a felt image that brings changed feelings. And of course we resonate what comes, with an inner checking for felt rightness.

1. Grounding in the physical here-and-now.

Examples. Elfie often uses these grounding guidelines with clients who come in feeling stressed. Some clients like to start every session with guided grounding. She also grounds herself to help her be in the here-and-now and get into her body.

Be in the here-and-now. Look around the room and notice what you see.

Then you may wish to close your eyes.

Feel your feet on the floor connected to the earth.

Feel your body on the chair or couch.

Take a few slow, deep breaths. Notice the miraculous quality of your breathing in that your breath breathes itself.

Notice how you feel inside after grounding.

While living on Pikes Peak, Dave's grounding was spiritual — a sense of belonging to something infinite. He felt billion-years-old granite thrusting up from earth's core. He felt hundreds of miles of forests and flowering tundra, reaching up into the clouds. When he moved to Denver, city-earth and buildings felt wrong. His body shrank from them, leaving him feeling floating, not all here, and de-spiritualized. He slowly established his belonging in Denver-earth by walking, literally step-by-step, feeling into the prairie soil created during the ice age. He felt his meaning in moving to Denver — to care for his grandchildren. This experience offered grounding, though of a different kind.

2. Centering in our embodied selves. Elfie centers herself by visualizing a line down the middle of her body. Our center can be in other places, such as in our hearts or stomachs. This Reality helps Elfie find strength. This centering also gives her and her clients a bodily focus.

Examples. As Elfie began to sense into her body, she noticed that the line of her center was a bit to the right. She noticed that she felt somewhat uncomfortable. She did not try to *fix it*. As she Focused, she realized that an issue was making her feel off-center, but her center gradually straightened as she went through the other Realities.

When Dave begins Focusing, he centers in his greater Self. However he experiences himself, he keeps feeling that he is always *more* than that. Centering in his greater Self, he more fully experiences the unique richness of who he is, his past, and who he is becoming. For Dave, opening up to another person's greater Self honors their unique preciousness as distinct, but not separate from him. He then experiences his clients as greater than any problem.

3. Bringing in something of beauty. We miss deep truths and potentials when we miss the beauty in ourselves, others, and our world. Experiencing beauty brings richness, fullness, and a oneness with something beyond our everyday world. Our living takes on the beauty that is giving itself to us.

Examples. Elfie remembered a yellow hibiscus with a deep red center from her patio garden. When she noticed how that memory felt in her body, she had an expansive feeling and an image of being connected with all of the flowers around the world.

For Dave, beauty is usually experienced as music playing inside him. His living is deeply affected by the music's rhythm, volume, and emotional tone.

4. Hoping. Without hoping, life becomes stuck with no way out, no way forward. This stuckness can bring deep fears, helplessness, and depression. Hoping isn't a specific possibility. Like trust and faith, hoping is the deep feeling that real and life-forward possibilities can emerge.

Examples. Elfie knows from much experience that Focusing will bring forward change. Hoping is now intrinsic in her Focusing. When she has hope, her energy moves up and forward, and she has more joy. When she notices that her energy is going downward, she pauses and remembers the hoping that comes from her Focusing process.

Dave can get trapped in a client's hopelessness. Then he physically reconnects with deeply knowing that people can change. Dave experiences these sensations as coming from The Larger System. He feels held by The Larger System in this *felt* belief. With hoping, Dave's world shines and sings with possibilities. Hoping energizes and empowers him. From here, he can empathically hold his clients and their hopelessness within his deep trust in their potential.

5. Bonding with a Beloved. With bonding there is an "*I*," a "*you*," and a "*we*" as a precious whole. Bonding might be with a significant other, or with God, a pet, or a place. Dave experiences this Reality as never being "just Dave," but also as bonding with important people and other Realities of his world. Without bonding, he experiences a gnawing, isolating emptiness. He's not just missing something "out there," he's also missing a sense of himself. In important ways, who "Dave" is comes from his experience of being as one with another.

Examples. When Focusing on bonding, Elfie had a felt-image of a thick tree trunk joining her and her husband. The roots of the trunk were in each of their bodies. This image felt solid. Then she was surprised to notice a small cut out "v" in the trunk. She realized that this felt image was pointing to something that could hurt her relationship. She felt an urgent wanting to Focus on this issue.

When a Reality is missing or diminished, Elfie experiences this lack as a deep longing. For many years she had a yearning to bond with a beloved who could share that which was deeply inside of himself. When she found such a person, the longing ceased.

6. Forgiving ourselves and others. When we have not forgiven ourselves or others, something stays stuck. It can be hard to move on in some areas of our lives. Forgiveness involves letting go of the guilt, tension, hurt, and anger that can even harm our health. Forgiving is as important for us as it is for others. Forgiving does not mean forgetting. Trust still needs to be earned over time.

Example. After much Focusing on her block to forgiving her parents, Elfie let forgiving come into her. She finds that an image of experientially letting go of the felt block often

helps. She sometimes imagines letting these feelings of the block go down a river. After forgiving does its work, she feels much more free and light, more spacious inside of herself, and more open to the Reality of loving.

7. Loving. When we experience loving, we feel deeply real and worthwhile, and we have a sense of belonging. When we don't experience loving, we lack a fullness, richness, and potential goodness. We miss the basic truths and a full sense of wholeness. Feeling loving towards ourselves is as important as loving others.

Examples. When Elfie experiences the Reality of loving, her heart feels as if it is opening widely. If there is a felt block to either giving or receiving love, she Focuses on that block.

Two early bonding experiences bring loving into Dave's *experiencing*. He sees his grandma's face smiling at him as she swings him around, and he feels his grandpa's legs protectively behind him. Dave allows their loving to flow into him and then out others. When clients can't love some aspect of themselves, Dave asks them if they *will let him* love that *aspect of them*, and then the client is often able to accept Dave's loving.

8. Experiencing something vast and greater than ourselves. This might God, Allah, the Buddha, the night sky, the vastness of nature, or the universe (Hinterkopf, 2015).

Examples. When Dave Focuses, he consciously felt-senses each Reality as coming out of and participating into infinity. Without something vast and greater, his felt sensing and his Realities become more shallow with a brittle vulnerability.

Elfie felt how God was in her and how she was a part of God. This gave her a powerful "whoosh" feeling going up into the sky. As she felt The Larger System in her body, she felt very broad and tall, broader and taller than she could imagine the size of the universe.

9. Balancing suffering, fear, and grieving with hope, purpose, and meaning. Problems and issues, big and small, often come into our bodies with suffering, fear, grieving, and many kinds of difficult, even painful feelings. These hurts — with their deep meanings — are an important part of our lives and our world. So they are a vital Reality in The Larger System.

At first, it may seem strange, that *these* feelings, *these* ways of experiencing are important.

But as Gendlin says, *The Larger System involves everything*. Indeed, every life does involve suffering, fear, grieving, and similar feelings. Therefore, this Reality helps us embrace something important that we may be *bodily* blocking. Opening ourselves to these hurts broadens our experiencing and makes our Realities more truthful and authentic. We may also find ourselves moving toward *what in us* and *in our world* most needs healing and steps forward.

Examples. In the past Elfie was concerned that she was staying on the Internet late at night, even when she didn't want to. This issue was starting to get out of control. The problem felt like a tight wire wrapped around the center of her body. She knew that she had overcome other issues and that her previous experiences would help her find her way

out of this one. Her hope came as a light at the end of a tunnel, she felt deeply relaxed and supported.

Dave often unconsciously blocks his fears and the suffering of others. In Focusing, he realized he was blocking realistic financial fears about leaving a secure practice and moving where no one knew him. As he let himself experience these fears, an awareness of his purpose — to be with his grandchildren — became much stronger. He took more steps to increase his income, and he slept better, enjoying his family more and taking better care of himself.

PROCESS QUALITIES REVEALING THE LARGER SYSTEM

Generally, we find the more our experiencing opens to Focusing-Oriented Realities, the more we open to The Larger System.

We're also finding that The Larger System may reveal itself more through what we call "Process Qualities" than through the content of the Realities. The Qualities, listed below, are The Larger System's experiential footprints. Dave finds that when these Qualities are present, he trusts that he's more fully experiencing The Larger System. Where these Qualities are missing or cramped, he moves cautiously, even with Realities such as loving, hoping, and connecting with something infinite.

As with Realities, there can be no complete list of Process Qualities. Any Quality can be combined with other Qualities. Any Quality can also be further subdivided. And The Larger System is so rich and so creative a process that discovering new Process Qualities is always possible. Some Process Qualities are briefly listed below:

- Coming as an abundant gift that I don't have to deserve and that I can't use up
- Presencing, holding, and nurturing that I can let go into fully, safely, and physically
- Bringing a deep sense of coming home and belonging
- Reaching out to me as I am reaching out to them, as if involving a mutual magnetism
- Meeting deep wants and basic needs, making me more of who I am and what I can become
- Knowing me and my situation — both what is shared and what is unique
- Guiding, not forcing me in ways toward more right living
- Helping me experience others and my world as they more truly are and can become
- Bringing together and reordering in ways that are respectful, inclusive, and fresh
- Working and creating in ways that bring felt-rightness, not self-righteousness
- Expanding and developing, while always implying still more
- Opening to what's more and different, especially to Realities and experiences that are difficult, painful, rejected, and denied

In my standard Focusing process, I first pause, *inviting and letting* a felt-sense come into my body. As the felt sense starts to form, I start to feel different inside. Getting a fresh felt sense always feels like a powerful and new step forward. Then, once the felt sense makes its presence known, I pause again to *let that felt sense open and do its work in my body, bringing a physically-felt change and my next step forward*. In other words, there are *two pauses — one for a felt sense coming and another for a felt sense working*.

In these pausings, I let go of my usual controlling, analyzing, problem-solving. I invite and allow *the felt sense's processes* — its coming and its working in my body. *I let the felt sense's processes guide me*.

With Focusing-Oriented Realities, I also do two pauses. These pauses are similar to what I do in standard Focusing. The big difference is that with Focusing-Oriented Realities, both I *and* my felt sense *pause together*.

First, we pause to *invite and let a physical sense of a Focusing-Oriented Reality come around and into both my body and the felt sense*. As we feel a Focusing-Oriented Reality's physical presence, this also feels like a powerful and new step forward.

When a Focusing-Oriented Reality (FOR) is physically present, both I and my felt sense pause again. Here *we pause to let that FOR open and do its work*. The FOR does its work both in my body *and* in the felt sense. Like standard Focusing when a felt sense is doing its work, we (I and the felt sense) continue pausing until we can feel that the FOR has done its work.

Of course The Larger System with its Realities and Qualities also comes and works in many other ways, sometimes surprising us when we least expect it.

CONCLUSION

We hope that sharing our experiences will give you a sense of how Focusing-Oriented Realities can enhance Focusing. Attending to these Realities brings power and healing into our Focusing that can lead us into The Larger System. The Larger System may be found in each Reality.

In the above examples, you may notice that Focusing-Oriented Realities embody basic human needs — core processes of who we are and who we're trying to become. We experience these Realities as deeply real. As Gendlin recently said, "They're not just feelings."

We both have worked with these Realities for years, developing distinct as well as similar approaches and understandings. We hope that our sharing encourages you to find your own pathways. By taking the time to explore your own Focusing-Oriented Realities and sharing what you discover, The Larger System gets even larger for us all!

Let us end as we began, with a quote from Eugene Gendlin.

There's 'Something Bigger' that comes looking for me...It's like 'It wants me'....I and many other people always seem to assume that we have to do

whatever it is. But if we point out that we're part of a Bigger System...we find that we usually 'know' this very deeply. It does half the job just to know that there is a Bigger System, and I'm part of it, I'm in it, I'm not differentiated from it...

If I don't stop, I won't get it. But if I pause, then the Bigger System works with me.

(Gendlin, phone courses, 2014)

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PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH GROUP INCIDENT PROCESS (PCAGIP): A New Presenter-Friendly Approach To Case Conference

Mako Hikasa, Yoshiko Kosaka, and Shoji Murayama

INTRODUCTION

PCAGIP (pronounced as Picagippu) is an innovative method of case conferencing that was developed by Shoji Murayama (2012) to make case conferences more supportive for presenters. PCAGIP integrates Person-Centered Approach Group principles with the Incident Process method invented by Pigors (1980) to solve problems through an active process of inquiry by participants.

The basic sequence of a PCAGIP supervision session is the following. First, a case presenter provides a brief piece of information about the case. Then, the participants ask non-critical questions to help the case presenter to more deeply understand the overall situation of the case and find a new carrying-forward directions. The inquiry is designed to fully evoke participants' experience and wisdom, creating a learning situation for both presenter and participants.

In this paper, we introduce the principles, setting, procedure and characteristics of PCAGIP. In order to illustrate how a PCAGIP case conference proceeds, we also describe a PCAGIP supervision session that took place at the third Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy conference.



Shoji Murayama showing how to take notes
on a black board for PCAGIP



“Introduction to PCAGIP”
(Murayama & Nakata, 2012)

BACKGROUND

To provide context for the PCAGIP approach, it is important to clarify the role of the case study in the context of the professional culture of Japanese clinical psychology. In Japanese clinical psychology, case studies are highly valued both as research and training methods. At conferences for the Japanese Clinical Psychology Association, presenters are typically required to prepare long and detailed case reports for discussion. In JCPA conferences, it is common for a case presentation to take as long as two hours.

Case conferences in the JCPA often establish a situation in which presenters can feel unsafe and sensitive to feedback, for several reasons. For one thing, presenters invest a substantial amount of time and effort in preparing the detailed case reports required for presentation, therefore the stakes are very high. Also, because the report is usually written exclusively from the therapist's own point of view, the therapist may feel exposed. Finally, commentators at case conferences are typically instructors or senior therapists, and in their efforts to teach a junior case presenter they often point to deficiencies in the case presenter's work. Therefore, comments on cases tend to be perceived by the presenter as critical, even when well-intentioned. Often, junior therapists feel pressure and anxiety about presenting. As a result, they avoid presenting their cases, even when they desperately need support to address difficulties in their therapeutic work. The fraught atmosphere of case presentations, in short, can stifle the voices of junior therapists. From a Focusing point of view, the problem with traditional JCPA case conferences is that these conferences can elicit Critic attacks that prevent both the presenter and the commenters from fully accessing their intuitive felt senses of the case material.

In order to address these problems, Shoji Murayama developed PCAGIP as a more presenter-friendly approach to case presentations than the traditional Japanese approach. Shoji Murayama is a pioneer in PCA and Focusing in Japan. A student of Carl Rogers, Murayama ran PCA-oriented Encounter Groups for more than 40 years. He is a translator of the Japanese edition of the original *Focusing* book and invited Gendlin to his first visit to Japan in the late 1970's. Murayama also chaired the school counseling project in Japan. PCAGIP is the result of the crossing of these areas of Murayama's work.

In 2010, Murayama was invited to be a commentator for a case conference in Mako Hikasa's graduate school, Taisho University graduate school of clinical psychology. Murayama facilitated a PCAGIP style conference. It was a big success. Students enjoyed the PCAGIP approach to the case conference, and found that it nurtured the sense of fellowship among them. The students found PCAGIP an easier, safer, and more creative way of improving therapy practices than a traditional case conference. Hikasa then invited Murayama to a peer supervision group of Focusing-oriented therapists, *Collegium Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy Tokyo*. Since then, PCAGIP has become one of the main approaches of that group. The members of this group, Mako Hikasa, Naomi Horio, Kazuyoshi Nakamura, and Yoshiko Kosaka presented PCAGIP at the third FOP conference 2014.

THE DEFINITION OF PCAGIP

Here is the definition of PCAGIP by Murayama. *"Following very brief information on a case by a case presenter, participants including a facilitator, ask questions in turn, to help the case presenter understand the whole situation and find a new carrying-forward direction. All of the participants' experience and wisdom are fully utilized in this process. With this process, everybody will not only learn about the case itself, but also experience the group's supportive and creative process"* (Murayama, 2012, p12).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PCAGIP

The following is a list of characteristics of PCAGIP.

1. The process of the case conference is regarded as a community activity and a group process.
2. Instead of an authoritarian commentator as in a traditional case conference, in PCAGIP there is a collaborative facilitator. To create a sense of safety in the group, the facilitator sits next to the presenter and facilitates each member's active participation.
3. The purpose of PCAGIP is to understand the whole situation of the case, including the presenter's contribution to that situation.
4. **It is prohibited to criticize the case presenter.** The presenter should not be accused. One of the main features of PCAGIP is the prohibition of critical comments. This rule is intended to protect the participants and presenter from Critic attacks. As a result, the atmosphere becomes free and creative, which allows an organic carrying forward to happen.
5. In order to fully engage participants in the discussion, **members are prohibited from taking notes, with the exception of one or two note-takers.**
6. The note-takers record all the information from the on-going interaction on the black (white) board, which all members can see during the process.
7. The interaction usually produces a "case support network map" (PCA-map) which shows the whole situation of the case.
8. Often, new ideas for support emerge by looking at the map.
9. **We don't have to reach a conclusion.** It is better to produce as many ideas as possible, creating a pool of possible intervention ideas. The case presenter can then choose from among all of these ideas.
10. At the end of the session, the case presenter and the participants share what they have learned from the experience.
11. The session requires approximately 60-90 minutes, but it depends on the case.

There is an additional important rule:

12. **The participants take turns asking questions.** Each participant is obliged to ask a minimum of one (or two) questions at a time in Round 1 (see “PCATGIP at a glance”). One reason Murayama developed this rule is that Japanese are hesitant to speak up in a group. Japanese people often need more time than Americans to speak up or ask questions. Moreover, in traditional case conferences a dynamic can sometimes occur in which a small number of vocal members dominate the floor. Murayama’s formula, by contrast, gives even the most reserved participants the opportunity to speak up. In doing so, PCAGIP makes the case conference format democratic.

FOCUSING-ORIENTED PCAGIP

For more than 3 years, we have implemented PCAGIP at Collegium Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy Tokyo. After two sessions with Murayama as facilitator, we now routinely use the PCAGIP style of case conferencing in our monthly meetings. Since PCAGIP requires no preparation, anyone who has an urgent need for consultation can immediately make use of our group’s support.

Our Focusing orientation informs our group’s style of using PCAGIP. According to Murayama, our sessions include more pauses than PCAGIP sessions in other settings. The pauses occur because we Focus before each question and answer. Both questions from the participants and answers from the presenter tend to come from deeper places; from a sensing of the whole situation. Focusing-oriented interaction guided by a felt sense of the whole situation produces fruitful results. We Focusers are Focusing during PCAGIP process, so we could call our style of PCAGIP “Focusing-oriented PCAGIP”.

PCAGIP at a glance

(translated from Murayama and Nakata (2012) pp.32-33)

PCAGIP (Person-Centered Approach Group Incident Process):
Exploring together on the relational dimensions of Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy
Mako Hikasa, Naomi Horio, Kazunori Nakamura and Yoshiko Kosaka
Afternoon Workshops: SESSION 1 - 1:30 – 3:15, Sat. MAY 17, 2014
Third International Conference On Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapies

I. What is PCAGIP?

PCAGIP (pronounced as Picagippu) is a new method of group supervision developed by Shoji Murayama(2012), who intended to make case conferences more case-presenter-friendly. It combines the Person Centered Approach Group principles with the Incident Process method which was invented by P. Pigors(1980) to solve problems through active process of inquiry by the participants.

Following very brief information on the case by the case presenter, the participants including a facilitator ask questions to help the case presenter to understand the whole case situation and find a new carrying-forward direction. All the participants' experience and wisdom are fully utilized in this process and everybody will learn about the case, while finding the group supportive and heuristic.

II. Basic principles:

New view for the case conference

1. It is based on the PCA view on humans and human relations.
2. The case presenter's own actualizing direction is valued.
3. The case conference is regarded as a community activity.
4. The case conference is regarded as an encounter group.
5. The facilitator's role is to protect safety of the group especially for the presenter and to facilitate the interactions.
6. The participants are the research partners working for the case presenter and explore the direction for the solutions.
7. The process is more valued than the results.
8. No need to get to the conclusion. It is enough to get some hints useful for the presenter.

III. Setting

1. The group consists of a case presenter, a facilitator, 2 note takers, and approximately 8 members.
2. To visualize and share the information, 2 blackboards(white board or flip charts), on which note takers take notes, are prepared.
3. Participants sit in a semi-circle facing blackboard(s).
4. It is prohibited to criticize a case presenter.
5. There is no need of conclusion. It is enough to have many possible ideas.

IV. Procedure

In order to make the space safe and confident, a facilitator asks members to observe the following two rules.

1. **Do not accuse or criticize a case presenter.**
2. **Do not take notes.**

Round 1

1. The case presenter briefly presents the aim of presenting the case, the difficulties he/she faces, and what he/she wants from this conference.
2. The participants ask questions to a case presenter in order to understand the presenter and the situation around him/her. Note takers write the presenter's responses on the boards.
3. The participants take turns to ask a question. Each participant has a right and duty to ask one question at a time. Usually one exchange of Q and A triggers the next participants to find another question and the process of exploration naturally unfolds. It takes about 1 hour to go around the circle 2 or 3 times.
4. At a proper time, the facilitator reviews the situation written on the white boards.

Round 2

1. Both the presenter and participants come to feel safer than in Round 1 and the atmosphere of the circle softens.
2. Summarizing of the information above, questions tend to become deeper and more personal.
3. The facilitator creates a free atmosphere to facilitate diverse viewpoints to come up. (No need to take turns any more.)
4. In additional 50 minutes or so, we come to see the whole picture of the situation surrounding the case and the case presenter. Again the facilitator reviews this whole picture, which Shoji Murayama sometimes calls "Pica Map"(or Pica support network map). Often at this stage, the case presenter can see how and which way she/he needs to proceed.

Closing

1. Appreciating the "Pica Map" together, the case presenter shares his/her impression about the experience of PCAGIP process. We can end with this sharing.
2. If time allows, each of participants also can share their impression.

V. Process

1. You will experience a CO-creative heuristic group process.
2. You will see diverse perspectives among the participants who would widen and deepen the understanding of the case situation including the case presenter.
3. The case presenter will get many new ideas to help him/her to work better with the case situation.
4. Safe atmosphere will allow participants to go into a deeper interaction that might unexpectedly bring rich unfolding, even starting with the superficial Q&A format.
5. You will experience satisfaction, fulfillment and solidarity in exploring one project together.

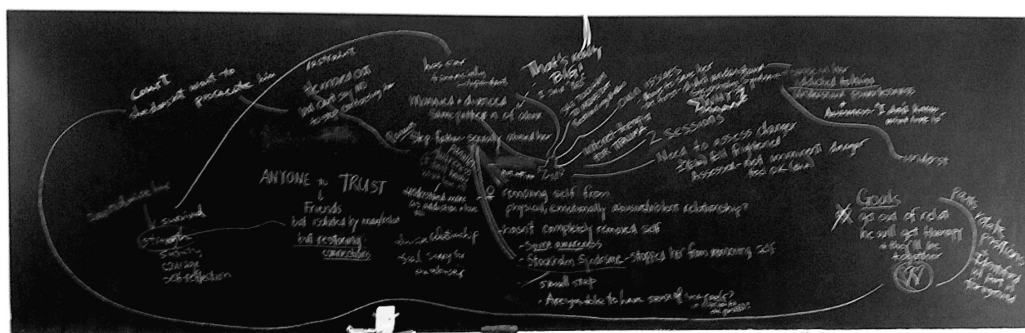
Notes: This is only the first step of the original Incident Process. When it does not feel enough, you may go into further Steps (Finding the key issues, Decisions and reasoning etc.). But in principle we do not go further:

PCAGIP SESSION IN THE THIRD FOT CONFERENCE

In the third FOT conference, we tried out a PCAGIP in English with 5 English speaking participants (Ann Weiser Cornell, Leslie Ellis, Jim Iberg, Elizabeth Lehman, and Laury Rappaport) and 4 Japanese presenters (Mako Hikasa, Naomi Horio, Kazunori Nakamura and Yoshiko Kosaka). In order to maintain confidentiality, we withhold the names of the volunteers and questioners. In addition, we did not record the session, so the following outline of the PCAGIP session is a rough reconstruction from memory and notes.

At the beginning, we requested volunteers: A case presenter and a note-taker from the participants. Mako Hikasa took the facilitator role. Yoshiko Kosaka and a volunteer were note-takers. One person (from now on we call this person “A therapist”) spontaneously volunteered to be a case presenter.

Providing the first brief piece of clinical information, the therapist said, “I have a new female client. She was recently severely physically abused by her husband, but she does not wish to end the relationship. She describes herself as having ‘Stockholm syndrome’. I have trouble understanding this”. The note-takers wrote this information on the board.



The PCA-map for this session: Final state of notes on the black board

Facilitator: Do we need to make it clear what the “Stockholm syndrome” means?

- A1: It is a phenomenon wherein the victim feels extremely bad, sorry for the abuser.
 Q2: How many times did you meet her?
 A2: Only twice.
 Q3: How do you feel about the case, overwhelmed or grounded?
 A3: Mmm...I was frightened at first. But now I am OK, after having gotten enough information to determine that she is safe at this moment.

(There were then some questions about the client’s situation and resources. And the therapist answered questions about the client’s line of work, economic situation and her family. In order to honor confidentiality, we omit that part of the discussion.)

- Q6: What does she think about her problem?
- A6: She had already divorced once, and married again. She was a victim of domestic violence in her previous marriage. Also, she was repeatedly abused sexually by her stepfather in her childhood. She described herself as being “addicted to her husband”. It’s hard for me to understand her feeling sorry for husband given that he has so violently abused her and threatened to take her life. I helped her recognize there were many parallels with her childhood abuse. She said “I do not know what love is.” I said to her, “That’s big.”
- Q7: Does she still live with him?
- A7: He left. But she has not completely detached herself from him.
- Q8: How did she become separated from her husband?
- A8: She asked him to leave.
- Q9: How did she come to you?
- A9: She searched my office through the internet.
- Q10: Does she have someone to support her?
- A10: She had some friends. As usually happens in abuse cases, her partner isolated her from her friends, but she is now trying to reclaim her old friendships.
- Q11: How could she be separated from him, while still addicted to him?
- A11: There was a court restraining order, but it did not prevent him from visiting her. She moved out of her apartment.
- Q12: I ask about you, so please tell me if you find it critical. Does this case touch something personally in you?
- A12: I’ve asked myself that same question. In some ways yes and in some ways no.
- Q13: What would it be like, if you see this as an addiction?
- A13: That is very helpful. Stockholm syndrome is strange for me, but addiction I can understand. She is addicted to him, but she said that she does not know what love is.
- Q14: What is her good point? Strength?
- A14: She has the strength of surviving all that she has. I admire her and told her that.
- Q15: What does she want as her goal?
- A15: She is confused. On one hand, she knows she needs to be separated from him. On the other hand, she wants her partner to meet a good therapist and get better. She wants for them to live happily together.
- Q16: So she has two conflicted wishes. Do you know how she relates with these two parts?
- A16: She is identified with one and then with the other. It changes. We gave names to the two parts. She goes back and forth between the two.
- Q17: As a therapist, what do you think is your next small step?
- A17: That is what...just asked (in Q16). I will ask her about how she is relating with her two parts.
- Facilitator: Are there any other questions?
- Participants: Nothing more.
- Facilitator: Do you think you can finish?
- A18: Yes. I feel I can better move forward.

There was then a summary of the session, and the case presenter, note-takers and participants shared their impressions about the process. Here is the case presenter's comment: "It was very supportive. I did not expect that much. The sharing itself was supportive. When I was holding this alone, it felt very heavy and hard. Here in this space, I realized I was holding so much (as written in the blackboard)! I put it out here and had more space to move freely. The space was created, and the questions helped me realize what would be a good next step. I could see more, her resources and other things as a whole." One of note-taker's comments: "I became happy in writing this down. I thought this was expressive. We found her strength gradually, actually seeing it and sharing it together". At the end of the session, the case presenter took picture of the notes (PCA-map) on the black board, which she can look at again by herself.

FEEDBACK

After the session, we requested permission from the presenter and the participants to prepare this article, and asked them to write the impressions of this experience. The following are their comments:

"I'd like to add that the experience has stayed with me as a very positive one. Even at the time there was a sense of "rightness" to the process, especially in comparison to previous group supervision experiences. This approach to group supervision felt very unthreatening, collaborative, supportive and helpful. I'm looking forward to trying it within a peer supervision group. It seems especially well suited for that." (From the case presenter.)

"Some of what I appreciated about the process:

- 1. It produced very balanced participation from all participants*
- 2. It protected the "supervisee" from being subjected to critical comments, which helped her delve more deeply into the case.*
- 3. The record that was kept of the things that were said seems to me a valuable resource for further consideration by the supervisee of the issues.*
- 4. Participants didn't have to compete for opportunities to make their contributions/ ask their questions, since it was clear everyone would get a chance."*

"It was a very friendly and democratic way to conduct group supervision. The one aspect that is most different from all the supervision groups I have participated in is the visual aspect, the two note-takers keeping track of the details as they emerged. I think not only can this practice serve as an excellent record of the session, as another person said, but it also enabled me/us to make visual and intuitive connections with the client's material that I may not have made without the visual representation. The whole structure seemed designed to make its participants relax and join in a collaborative effort to help the therapist help the client. As I said, I will implement this structure in

the supervision groups I now lead or participate in. First I will have to get myself a large whiteboard!"

CONCLUSION

In this session, the rules of taking turns and asking only one or two questions at a time played different roles than they normally do during PCAGIP sessions in Japan. Japanese people tend to be silent, so these rules function to encourage vocal participation. In the session above, however, these rules functioned instead to encourage the participants to hold their questions. The rules imposed a pause within which Focusing occurred. This seemingly restricting rule elicited curiosity and reflection, leading to more fruitful interaction. Also, the Focusing attitude and the prohibition of criticism helped the process to be gentle and organic.

The democratic participation of everyone in the conference allows a therapist to find his or her own answer. The answer is generally *more* than the therapist can find or understand on his/her own. The therapist can take away the photo of the PCA-map to revisit and review after the conference.

Acknowledgments: We would like to express our gratitude to all the participants in the PCAGIP session at the third FOP conference 2014.

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FOCUSING, JEWISH SPIRITUALITY AND MY SEARCH FOR MEANING

Ruth Hirsch

INTRODUCTION

It was spring, 1978. Under a cloudless, African sky I'd just ridden an old 3-speed American bike out over dusty dirt roads in Niger's capital, Niamey, to visit my friend Kitty. I always enjoyed visiting Kitty, mostly because we enjoyed each other's company, and also because it was a treat for me as a Peace Corps Volunteer to spend even a small amount of time in an area of the city with nice homes and lawns. A respite from the rural village where I was living and working as a Health Educator, setting up and running small maternal and infant care clinics.

After catching up with each other's news, Kitty casually mentioned that she and her husband were planning a Seder and that they would like to invite me.

"A what?" I replied.

"A Passover Seder," answered Kitty.

"But I'm not Jewish."

Kitty looked at me with surprise and incredulity.

Sensing her confusion, I shared what I knew of my past which is that my father had been raised Jewish, and that my mother's father had been Jewish, but that they'd decided to leave the religion soon after they married. I'd always figured that being Jewish was something one could opt out of.

I was 24 years old and did not know that I was Jewish. It was to be another 22 years before I learned the truth of my identity, which is that my maternal grandmother — for whom I was named — actually had been Jewish, and therefore, so was my mother, and so am I. I also learned that while it is possible to choose to be Jewish, when one is born into the tribe, one is Jewish for life, regardless of observance.

I am reminded here of a friend's comment upon my sharing with him soon after learning that I was Jewish: "With a name like yours, and a face like yours, how could you not know?!" That line always struck me as funny.

Humor aside, the descriptors confusing, convoluted, and love-hate would not be overstating the complexity of my relationship with the religion of my ancestors.

Given this, it continues to feel like a miracle that I am where I am today — happily living a fulfilling Jewish life in the middle of Jerusalem.

Focusing played an integral part in this miracle.

My relationship with Focusing and Jewish spirituality began to flower at about the same time a little over 20 years ago. In 1994, I began to study and learn Focusing, and also made a social, religious, and time commitment to my Jewish practice by becoming a member of a synagogue for the first time in my life.

Looking back over the past 20 years, I can see that the evolution of my understanding of Focusing and my connection to Jewish spirituality have been interdependent, each having informed the growth of the other. To a great extent, Focusing has played an important role in supporting my growing involvement with Jewish life. Likewise, my understanding of Jewish spirituality has deepened my understanding and practice of Focusing.

My goal in this piece is to explore some of the values that are shared by both Focusing and Jewish spirituality, and to offer some examples of the many ways that Focusing has supported my understanding and observance of Jewish spirituality. I will also look at a pivotal point in my developing connection with Judaism that shaped my understanding and practice of Focusing.

WHAT DO I MEAN BY “FOCUSING”?

I’ll begin with my understanding of Focusing, which was and continues to be so important in permitting, supporting, and nurturing my spiritual growth. I will define what it is for me — and why it has been so important as a tool for healing and growth in my life.

Focusing is a process of helping us find what is alive in us. It is distinguished from other forms of inner relationship approaches to healing and growth through the felt sense, the body’s way of manifesting the gestalt of some issue.

Focusing is a process of *allowing* what is true for us, at levels deeper than what might immediately bubble up into conscious awareness. We do this by becoming aware of our bodies — and through our bodies becoming aware of what wisdom, or truth, is literally embodied within us.

Finding what is alive in us doesn’t necessarily mean what is happy and vibrant, but rather, what it is that is actually *living* within us. When we are able to spend time with what is present within us, including those parts we might fear or wish to push away, we open ourselves to the potential of bringing more aliveness into our lives than we might ever have imagined.

Focusing is an art in which we become aware that reality holds much more possibility and beauty than we might have believed. With Focusing we no longer see one, or two, or more aspects of ourselves as who we are. Rather, we begin to understand that the truth of who we are is so much more vast, so much more exciting, so much more alive than we had previously suspected.

This knowing that came from my Focusing — that I was so much more than my limited sense about who I was — made space for what was to come.

Focusing involves the opposite of our typical fast pace and tendency to rush. We need to slow down, to pause. With the usual pace of our lives we miss much that is precious. As one colleague put it, “Focusing is a process that takes us much more deeply into life.”

Focusing offers a safe space, a container that at times can feel womb-like, where what is true can begin to emerge into consciousness. To Focus requires that we be able to make space for what is true for us *now*, in the present moment.

It is a practice that necessitates a level of intimacy and faith — of trusting ourselves, and also trusting that what comes is, in some respect, valid. We’re rewarded with being able to see and feel beauty within ourselves as well as in others, and by a sense of peace, balance, and spaciousness that we might never have imagined possible for us.

It has often felt to me as though Focusing is a way for God to speak to me. That is, by listening within, at times I’ve felt as though I’ve been able to hear the wisdom of the Divine as it has connected with my own body, heart and soul. The following is an example of this experience, which, incidentally, led to my first trip to Israel 14 years ago.

Stopping by my friend Jody’s home one morning to pick up the mittens I’d inadvertently left at a lecture the day before, I asked her if she had a few minutes to talk, as I’d like to ask her a few questions that had come up for me at the lecture.

She invited me in, and the two of us sat on the old sofa by the window in her wood-paneled Berkeley living room. Soon, after answering one or two questions, she looked me in the eyes and said, “You should go to Israel.”

Up to that point, the possibility of me visiting Israel wasn’t even in the realm of possibility for me. As soon as she said it, however, I began to cry. While such a trip certainly did not ‘make sense’ for me, financially or logistically, I experienced a sudden very powerful feeling — that even now comes as I recall this moment.

At the core of Focusing is the *bodily felt sense* — a palpable physical feeling one gets of a whole situation. The powerful feeling that came for me was my body’s felt response to her simple statement.

It almost stopped my breath. There was a strong feeling of, “Yes” — and amazement.

Then Jody also began to cry. When I asked her why she was crying, she responded that she had chills — and that her suggestion felt deeply right to her, too.

My felt sense was so clear about the rightness of this idea that I soon began to move forward with making plans. That conversation took place on the 24th of December in 1999. Less than seven weeks later I was in Jerusalem, looking forward to a nine week visit in Israel.

This visit, by the way, was unplanned. Other than purchasing a ticket and arranging for a place to stay, I’d made no plans at all for what I’d be doing during that time. Further, my traveling budget was miniscule. What I did have was an intention to see as much as I could, to meet folks, and to share Focusing and Conscious Touch with other body-workers and therapists. In those nine weeks, I was able to do all of this — and more.

Without Focusing, I don't know whether I would ever have visited Israel. It is highly doubtful that I'd have been able, just two years later, to leave my home of 18 years in the San Francisco Bay Area to move to what was at the time, a virtual war zone in Jerusalem.

Making the decision to move to Israel involved many Focusing sessions during another visit to Israel, primarily with my very supportive Focusing partner, and also on my own. I discuss this process in more detail in another essay entitled "The Decision" which is available by request.

In Focusing there is a sense of spaciousness, curiosity, really wanting to know what is there beneath the level of conscious awareness. In retrospect, I believe that it was this aspect of Focusing that was most significant in helping me to make this decision: *whatever arises to consciousness, whatever is within us, is welcome*. I find this particular attitude very helpful when it comes to making decisions because it precludes what is often a tendency to favor one choice or another that would be preferred by one's friends and/or family, or socially acceptable, or best for one's career, etc.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN FOCUSING AND JEWISH SPIRITUALITY

There are four important areas of similarity, including:

- fostering aliveness
- the idea of a container
- a connection to the body, and
- the idea that everything/everyone is unique, worthy of attention

Aliveness. I see the essence of Focusing as fostering aliveness. When that which has previously been unrecognized on a conscious level can come to awareness, we are able to be more alive. After Focusing, there is often a sense that something has shifted from being two dimensional to being multi-dimensional. There is a sense of greater possibility, and often of increased vitality as well.

The Jewish people are sometimes referred to as The People of the Book. This book, the Torah, or Jewish Bible, a core guide for observant Jewish life, is often symbolized as The Tree of Life.



Jewish spirituality is basically a celebration of aliveness. Practicing Judaism has certainly brought more vitality into my life. Judaism, perhaps to a greater degree than other major religions, celebrates being alive. We are meant to enjoy life. At the same time, we are meant to understand that everything in the world was created by God — including us!

How does Jewish spirituality bring more vitality to my own life? My sense is that it is a combination of two factors.

One is the reality that Jewish practice views all aspects of human life as spiritual, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night.

The other is that being an observant Jew involves being much more conscious of aspects of living than I'd ever been aware of before. Living in this new way made possible a recognition of the richness inherent in everyday life.

For me, a sense of vitality is directly related to the extent of awareness of my external and internal worlds. My experience with facilitating Focusing for many hundreds of others has confirmed that it may be a universal reality that *awareness fosters a sense of vitality*.

Container. In Focusing, the idea of creating safe space is requisite. We pay attention to what needs to happen in order for *what lives within us* to have the best chance of coming to light. We do our best to create a sense of safe space — which is fundamentally a metaphorical container into which something can have the best chance of breaking ground, of coming into conscious awareness.

The Torah states, “They shall make a Sanctuary (*mikdash*) for me, so that I may dwell among them.” In other words, God is commanding the Jewish people to create a place of holiness that will allow God to dwell with them.

My sense is that when we Focus, we allow ourselves to be open to God's presence, wisdom, compassion, and more.

The practice of Judaism has acted like a container for me, for my life. The tradition, community, commandments, and practices have created a substrate in which I can grow and thrive, spiritually and in other ways as well.

The Body. Little need be written about Focusing's connection with the body. The process of Focusing is based on connection with a felt sense that is by definition connected with the body.

Judaism is an embodied religion. In Jewish spirituality, the body is highly valued in that it is believed that through our physical bodies we can experience, as well as enhance and deepen, spirituality. In commanding us to “choose life,” the Torah is indicating that it is important to both respect and enjoy the physical aspect of life, and that it, too, is sacred.

The practice of *kashrut*, or keeping kosher is just one example of how the practice of Judaism engages the body, and at the same time, the mind and spirit. While the scope of this article doesn't allow going into detail about the practice of keeping kosher, it is important to know that commentators have delineated a range of reasons for the observance, including hygiene, ethics, national unity, mystical aspects, and discipline.

Since bringing Focusing to my Jewish observance, I've felt increasingly comfortable in my body. At the same time, Focusing has helped me to better connect with the divine, with God. When praying with a prayer book, I often find it hard to “connect.” At such times, it has become a custom for me to sense inside myself, and to pray from there. This has resulted in experiences that often feel profound to me. Something opens up; it feels as though I've shifted to another realm of existence where I can connect much more deeply.

All-embracing acceptance, that everything/everyone has value. An important ingredient for successful Focusing is being able to have an attitude of acceptance:

that whatever might come is not only worthy of attention, but also has a good reason for being there. And it is our curiosity and acceptance that will ultimately lead to change and transformation.

In Judaism, there is a tradition that holds that each letter in the Torah corresponds to one of the souls of the Jewish people. The meaning of this is that each soul is important in its own right. Each has something unique to contribute. Each has its own special value.

Among the many other values shared by both Focusing and Jewish spirituality in addition to acceptance are the importance of humility, respect, and truth.

HOW FOCUSING SUPPORTS MY CONNECTION WITH JEWISH SPIRITUALITY

Perhaps the most significant of the many ways that Focusing has influenced and enhanced my relationship with Jewish spirituality is in my ongoing struggle with my identity as a Jew.

Growing up with believing that I was “half-Jewish,” I felt as though I didn’t quite belong anywhere. Further, I grew up in an environment of anti-semitism: to this day, my mother describes herself as anti-semitic, and claims that my father was, as well.

I’ve grappled with internalized anti-semitism since I was a child. And yet now, when I look around me in my home in Jerusalem, I feel love, awe, and amazement — of my fellow Jews, Jewish philosophy, and the beauty, joy, and vibrancy of the Jewish life-style, religion, and culture.

So this is the paradox: On the one hand I was taught that Judaism is a religion that is old, dusty, and something to be ashamed of, while for the past 14 years I have been living a Jewish life and have never been happier.

The Jewish Bible teaches that we are each made in the image of God. What does this mean in terms of identity, and in particular, my sense of who I am?

While our sense of identity is colored by the past, at the same time it also goes through a process of evolution as we live our lives. Focusing is one of the primary tools I use to connect and more deeply understand myself, including aspects related to Judaism, spirituality, and meaning. By bringing the light of the present into the felt sense of the past, Focusing helped me to better understand myself, and to also actually facilitate a transformation of how I view myself.

A few words on how this works. Focusing is a process rooted in the present. We sit with and attend to the body-mind felt sense as it unveils itself to us in the moment. This felt sense is often a reflection of an integration of what our body-mind holds from the past — albeit as it appears in the present.

For me, by Focusing, my sense of myself as a Jewish woman shifted from feeling not OK, tainted, not belonging, to something quite different as I became aware that my heritage was actually an amazing gift.

This process was not spontaneous, but rather continues to this day. A quote by the philosopher Thomas Metzinger offers an apt description of the philosophy of Focusing: “Nobody ever had or was a self. The self is not a thing, but a process.”

My quest to connect to something bigger than myself, something with meaning and truth, has guided me in living my life since my teens.

After years of studying and practicing Eastern religions, Focusing quickly became the primary tool in my search. I used Focusing to feel into the rightness of my spiritual path. In this way it soon became clear that while I’d benefited from other paths, Judaism was the right path for me.

Focusing gave me this: I could sense inside, open myself to listening mode, and receive what came. Most often, the first thing that came was a wave of peace. By staying open, more comes. Jewish practice and community gave me something more. Following is one such example.

Every time I’ve been blessed to carry a Torah scroll, I’ve experienced a joy and sense of elevation that is palpable, and often wondered, “Where does this deep joy come from?” After all, I wasn’t brought up in this tradition.

Last year on the holiday of *Simchat Torah* I had the opportunity to sing and dance with the scroll, in the center of over a hundred women dancing in concentric circles and accompanying me in a joyful, uplifting chant.

The bliss I experienced was made even more sublime by sensing inside, and allowing the feelings of love and joy to flow through all of me — body, mind, heart, and soul.

Reflecting on this experience, I was struck by the sense that those dancing, chanting women formed a container within which I was able to have a deep bodily-felt spiritual experience.

HOW JEWISH SPIRITUALITY HAS TAUGHT ME MORE ABOUT FOCUSING

The idea of “container” first formed within me in relation to Judaism. It became evident to me that the Jewish religion is a container within which spirituality can grow and thrive.

An example of this is my ever-evolving relationship with *Halacha*, a Hebrew word meaning “way” or “path” that refers to the application of Jewish law to life. It is the aspect of Jewish practice that I most grapple with.

Having been raised in a home in which the idea of keeping any commandments was anathema, the idea of conforming to what felt like largely arbitrary rules imposed from external sources was — and in some senses continues — to be a challenge. Yet each time I have considered ousting one or another commandment from my life, before taking any action, I’ve sat to Focus on the decision.

So far, each time my inner being has contradicted the parts in me that have sought emancipation from the commandments. Each time, my body, my soul, seemed to have one voice. The rightness was not only palpable; it brought a sense of peace, of calm, of groundedness in me.

It was one such time that it became clear to me that the idea of *halacha*, rather than being limiting in a negative way, is actually a container within which I might grow and thrive.

This awareness has helped me to understand even more deeply than I had previously, how pivotal the qualities of safety, unconditional acceptance and compassion are in Focusing. It is these attitudes that make Focusing possible. Without them, there might be technique, but the process will lack the power made possible by creating a sense of a safe container, within which, what is there might be able to come to conscious awareness.

IN CONCLUSION

I feel incredibly grateful to have both Focusing and Judaism in my life.

I am grateful for Focusing because it continues to support me in finding and clarifying a personal sense of meaning. It supports my relationship with my cultural and spiritual heritage, which at times feels confusing and challenging. Focusing helps me to feel and be more whole.

And I feel grateful for the Jewish religion because it is both incredibly beautiful and compelling. For me, being Jewish is a process characterized by growth, development, and flowering. Through the inner wisdom that Focusing makes available to me, this process has been able to develop in a way that is in integrity with my whole being.

My understanding of both Jewish spirituality and Focusing continue to evolve. I look forward to the continuing blossoming of both in my life.

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SPACE PRESENCING:

A Potpourri of Focusing, Clearing A Space, Mindfulness and Spirituality

Akira Ikemi, Ph.D.

VIGNETTE ONE

She is recovering from anorexia nervosa. From her current weight, she can no longer be considered anorexic. But she keeps thinking about dying. That is why she was referred to me by a physician who had worked with her for many years. This was my first interview with her. We sat facing each other on a large round table. She talked about not wanting to be alive. After a little while, I said to her. “This is our first session, so let’s *lay it all out on this table*. This whole thing about not wanting to be alive, that’s a big heavy issue, so I’m putting it right here.” I stamp on the thick file of medical records. “Let’s see now, what else do we have here?”

She says “Okay.” Then she started to talk about feeling ‘paranoid’, worried about how others look at her. I needed a few moments to take that in. “What do you mean by ‘others’?” I ask. She says it’s women her age. She worries if they may be frowning at her about her dress and make-up. I needed a few moments to take that in. After a few moments I said, “It feels to me like you quite like to be fashionable because if you didn’t care about fashion and make-up and all that, you wouldn’t care about how others think of you.” She is dressed very fashionably with make-up, too.

She nods and says, “You know, that’s where I want to live.”

“Ah! Alright!” I exclaim. “So you are *aware of* (mindful of) both wanting to live and wanting not to live. And that’s great, because that awareness is not one or the other; it’s not wanting to live nor wanting to die. It’s just being aware of both.”

She nods. Then I say, “Let’s put all that about fashion and how people look at you, and wanting to live, *that whole thing*, we’ll put that right here.” I cup my hands next to the thick medical records. She stares at my hands for a little while and nods and says, “Okay”. “And then, what else?” I ask.

Towards the end of the interview, after laying out four or five heaps on the table, she said, “You know, I think too much. I want to give my mind a break...that’s when I want to die.”

“Bravo!” I said. “Let’s be *aware of* that, that your *thinking mind* works too hard; it needs a break. You need to give your mind a break from thinking too much...Of course, let’s do that right now. Let’s give your *thinking mind* a break, and here’s how.” I briefly explained mindfulness of breathing meditation, inviting her to attend to the rising and falling of the

chest-abdomen area with each breath, and invited her to do this for just 3 minutes. I also asked her to tell me if any distractions come to her mind during the 3-minute meditation.

We both started the meditation. About half a minute into the meditation, she smiled and said, “I have a distracting thought. It’s saying, ‘This isn’t going to work’”.

“Beautiful!” I said. “Your *thinking mind* is objecting to this; your thinking mind doesn’t want you to go on meditating. You know why? That’s because your thinking mind will weaken in meditation.” She smiled and nodded and then continued the meditation.

She came out of the 3-minute meditation looking relaxed. At the close of the session we had an interesting conversation about our next appointment. I had heard that she was asking for therapy on a once in two weeks basis, so I asked if she was going to come back for the next session in two weeks. She said, “I was just thinking that I’ve been in therapy for a long time, you know, and it’s not going to change me so fast so maybe I should come next month, rather than in two weeks.” Her comment brought a smile to me.

“That’s fine with me, but do you realize *who* is saying that? I just sensed that it’s your *thinking mind*. It’s saying, ‘You’re not going to change anyway, whatever you do’”. She smiled and said that I was right, and she made an appointment to come back in two weeks.

CLEARING A SPACE

This is how I do Clearing a Space (CAS) in therapy with a new client. I am quite process-directive with beginners. With the aforementioned client, I directed her to *lay it all out on the table*. I call this ‘*therapist-mediated* way of clearing a space’. By this term I refer to the process of CAS in which the therapist assists the process, for example, by suggesting where or how the client’s issues are to be placed. I use therapist-mediated CAS with beginners who may be unfamiliar with CAS or when the client is experiencing difficulties with CAS as shown in the next vignette.

Even though the process is therapist-mediated, the client in the earlier example looked at where the issues were placed and said “Okay,” as if to confirm that the issues were placed there. An inter-subjective experience arose, where for both *she* and *me*, the table was loaded with heaps of her concerns. In that inter-subjective experience, the table is seen as the whole of her experienced life, and she is mindful of the whole, not being attached, identified or overwhelmed by any particular aspect. The emphasis is on observing or witnessing the whole, rather than delving into a particular content of concern.

MINDFULNESS

The reader may notice the elements of mindfulness in this CAS vignette. With whatever comes into the client’s consciousness, I first say, “be aware of” that. The session (as well as the following vignette) was done in Japanese. I used the verb *kizuku* in Japanese, which roughly translates as “be aware of” or “notice that.” What is actually intended is the *Pali* word *sati* which is translated into English as “mindfulness.” The emphasis is on mindfulness

rather than the specific contents of thought. For instance, I said that it is important to be mindful of both wanting to die and wanting to live.

Another element of mindfulness here is the distinction I am making between the client and her *thinking mind*. I often call this *ga* (我) in Japanese, which can be translated as ‘ego’ denoting an assertive, obstinate, superficial portion of the self. It is a mind-set that controls feelings, perceptions and cognitions. In this case, it was asserting that “You are not going to change, whatever you do.” In this paper, I will be referring to *ga* as the *think-ego*. In the vignette above, the client introduces this distinction, when she says that *she* “wants to give her thinking mind a break.” There is a *she*, as separate from her think-ego which seems to control her.

VIGNETTE TWO

The following is a complete verbatim record of a demonstration at a workshop. The session went on for about 10 minutes. The client was new to Focusing.

- ME 01: Bring your attention to the middle of your body. By “middle of the body,” I mean the area around your throat, chest and abdomen. See how you are in there. Or see if something, or some situation, some concern is wanting your attention. If something arises, just say a few words about it, like “There’s something there about work, or a relationship”. You don’t have to say all the details.
- SHE 01: If I were to say it in one word simply, it’s ‘wanting to let it go out and not being able to’.
- ME 02: So there’s ‘wanting to let it go out and not being able to.’ Let’s first be aware of that. There’s a ‘wanting to let it go out and not being able to.’ So where can this be placed?
- SHE 02: On top of that building over there. (She looks out the window.)
- ME 03: Okay, let’s put all of that on the rooftop of that building over there. Okay? All right, so that’s there, and what else?
- SHE 03: There’s something about the company.
- ME 04: The company, yes, yes. There may be a lot of facets to that, but how is the whole thing felt in you?
- SHE 04: A rock, a big rock.
- ME 05: A big rock. And when you said that, I noticed that you smiled.
- SHE 05: It’s big for sure, but there isn’t a bad image about it.
- ME 06: It’s not a bad rock, but it’s big.
- SHE 06: Huge.
- ME 07: It’s huge. Where can we put this?
- SHE 07: It’s huge so I can’t move it. Right now, I don’t seem to be able to move it.
- ME 08: So where does this rock belong?
- SHE 08: In me?
- ME 09: Oh no, I mean, huge rocks like these might belong to a volcano.
- SHE 09: Oh, oh...if...uhm (silence)...someplace that is scenic...(ME: yes, yes)...like the Australian rock.

- ME 10: An Australian rock? (SHE: yes)
- SHE 10: Ayers Rock.
- ME 11: Ayers Rock. That huge?! (smiling) Then can we let this be side-by-side with Ayers Rock?
- SHE 11: Yes.
- ME 12: Okay then, we have two things here. One is on the rooftop over there on that building. The other is next to Ayers Rock. Let's see if there's anything else.
- SHE 12: Then there's the family issue.
- ME 13: The family issue.
- SHE 13: Yes.
- ME 14: And how does the family issue feel?
- SHE 14: Let me see.... I'm always so concerned about it, but it's always in the sidelines.
- ME 15: You're concerned about it, but it's in the sidelines.
- SHE 15: It's always there. But it's not in the center of my vision; it's always on the side.
- ME 16: Okay, it's always there on the sidelines of your vision. Uh hum, and what does that feel like?
- SHE 16: It doesn't feel bad at all. Ummm...let me see...It feels like I can never forget about this, I must always remember this; I must always carry this around.
- ME 17: I'm hearing you say, "I must never forget about the family, I must always keep that in my mind, I must always carry this around, it's this kind of thought." (SHE: Yes) Okay, shall we put this thought somewhere?
- SHE 17: Yes (silence).
- ME 18: And where does *it* want to go?
- SHE 18: The sky.
- ME 19: Wow, the sky!
- SHE 19: The sky.
- ME 20: What kind of sky?
- SHE 20: Blue and high.
- ME 21: Blue and high....
- SHE 21: (She sobs for 66 seconds.)
- ME 22: And what's happening in you?
- SHE 22: (Inaudible)...the moment I threw it to the sky, tears came. I don't know what's happening, I've never experienced this before. (She is speaking as she sobs.)
- ME 23: And what feeling accompanies your tears?
- SHE 23: I've never talked about this before, not in these workshops, so...(silence)
- ME 24: You're feeling a sense of relief, or...?
- SHE 24: Yes, because I never talked to anyone about this...It was the first time I ever talked about this.
- ME 25: So let's be aware that you talked about this for...(SHE: Yes)...And now that you've talked about it for the first time, how does it feel?
- SHE 25: Wow it's like, the guarding feeling came off.
- ME 26: Oh, it's like the 'guarding' came off. Yes, yes. So now, you are aware that you were guarding all this time. And now the guarding is off.
- SHE 26: Really, it feels warm.

- ME 27: Let's be with this warmth for a while. (SHE: Yes) (silence 40 sec) Did something come just now?
- SHE 27: (Smiling) My grandmother (ME: Oh) I have an image of her.
- ME 28: And is she saying something to you?
- SHE 28: She says nothing, she's just watching over me.
- ME 29: So there's the warmth and your grandmother watching over you. (Silence 34 sec.) And how are you now?
- SHE 29: My feelings...my shoulders feel clear...(ME: clear?) Like stiff shoulders I had for a long time is gone.
- ME 30: Okay, the stiff shoulders are gone, so be with the warmth as long as you like, and can we end the session whenever it feels right to do so.
- SHE 30: Yes...(silence 20 sec.) yes, (laughing) I feel good now!
- ME 31: Okay?
- SHE 31: I feel good. Yes, yes, let's end.

It was interesting to me that she said that it was the first time she ever talked about this issue (SHE 23, 24). Although, as clear as it was from the excerpts, she did not talk about the content at all. It must have felt to her like she had talked about it; in other words, this issue was experientially processed, even though she did not talk about its contents. Let us now examine this process in more detail.

CLEARING A SPACE AND SPACE PRESENCING

Three issues came during the session. It felt to me as if the issues got progressively more difficult. The first issue could be handled by the think-ego. *She* put the issue on the rooftop of a building (SHE 02). The next issue about the company felt like a huge rock. *She* could not move it (SHE 07). In other words, her think-ego could not distance itself from this rock. Notice that I consequently changed my response here to: "where does this rock belong?" (ME 08). She didn't seem to understand my response initially (SHE 08) but what I meant became clear to her after I shared an example (ME 09). Now the rock was as big as Ayers Rock (SHE 10) so I suggest putting it side-by-side with Ayers Rock (ME 11). This *therapist-mediated* way of clearing a space was introduced here because she seemed unable to move the huge rock. I suggested some place in nature which led her to the image of Ayers Rock, and I also suggested putting it side by side with Ayers Rock.

Interestingly, it felt to me as if we were seeing the same vision. This rock side by side with Ayers Rock is an inter-subjective experience. It felt to me, at least, that an inter-subjective world of she and me had emerged. Perhaps because of the emergence of this inter-subjective world, an issue that she was 'guarding' in the confidentiality of the interiors of her existence suddenly appeared onto our inter-subjective world. This issue was 'guarded' and she had never talked about it, hence it was 'structure-bound', a 'frozen whole' to use experiential terms (Gendlin, 1964). The structure to which she was bound in regard to this family issue was that she must always keep it in the 'sidelines of her vision' (SHE 14; 15); she must 'never forget about this'; 'must always remember this'; and 'must always carry this around'

(SHE 16). So how can *she* clear a space from this? Her think-ego will not let it go. She “must always carry this around.”

To overcome this rather frequently observed conflict, I changed my response to “where does *it* want to go?” (ME 18) I am relying on, or entrusting the situation to *another power* greater than her think-ego. Then the sky suddenly appeared, a high blue sky with grandmother watching over her (SHE 18-21; SHE 27-28). As she let’s go of this issue, an experiential process unfolded, as is evident from her sobbing (SHE 21). This process was not yet conceptual, so she didn’t know yet what was happening (SHE 22). An explicit, conceptual understanding of the process that unfolded here may not even be necessary, as is evident from the change happening to her, including the changes in her body. A ‘responsive combodging’ (Ikemi, 2014a, 2014b) is evident here, where her “guarded” mode of embodied being-in-the-world has shifted. She has changed, and it seemed important for me that she live in this newly generated way, with her warmth and her relaxed shoulders.

Space Presencing (SPR) is a name I am using to describe the process by which the sky emerged in the vignette above. *She* could not clear a space; it is *space* that presented itself. Interestingly the Japanese/Chinese character for space 空 also means ‘the sky’ and also the Buddhist term for ‘emptiness’. In vignette two there was a progression from CAS, to therapist-mediated CAS, to *Space Presencing*.

MINDFULNESS AND THE THINK-EGO

In a Japanese book called *Buddhism Updating* (2013), authors Issho Fujita (Zen monk and Focuser) and Sudhammacara Ryodo Yamashita (Zen monk turned Theravada Bikhu) discuss the issue of ‘who’ is meditating or ‘who’ is being mindful. They agree that as long as what they call “the monkey mind” or “the thinking mind” is meditating, meditation will not be effective. In this article, I have been referring to the ‘thinking mind’ as *think-ego*. Essentially the same observation can be made in Focusing as in Buddhist meditation. For example, Gendlin (1981/2007) writes: “Asking questions in the head, or trying to make the head dominate the body, never works...”(p.97)...Any of these processes might help lead you to “it”, but “it” must respond...”(p.98)

The think-ego may be referred to as ‘mental formations’ (Sanskrit: *samskara*) among the five skandhas in Buddhist philosophy or as *manas-vijnana* in Mahayana Buddhism, a level of consciousness which localizes and gives meaning to experience. Being mindful of mental formations constitutes one of the four establishments of mindfulness (Hahn, 1993).

THE TRANSPERSONAL / SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

What has been referred to as ‘the other power’ above signifies *tariki* 他力, a term in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism (*Johdo* and *Johdo Shin Shu* sects) that refers to the openness to the power of the other — Amitabha Buddha, working in our lives. The antonym of *tariki* is *jiriki* 自力, which means self-power. Commonly Zen is depicted as a *jiriki* (self-power) practice, where practitioners use their self-power to discipline themselves to meditate. Pure

Land Buddhism is commonly said to have abandoned such self-power techniques and stayed with the faith of Amitabha Buddha's works implicitly functioning in our lives. Using the terms of other-power (*tariki*) and self-power (*jiriki*), we can differentiate CAS and SPR. While CAS is a self-power method, SPR entrusts space to present itself.

Interestingly, in SHE 22, she says: "The moment I threw it to the sky, tears came. I don't know what's happening..." Did *she* throw it to the sky with her self-power? As I try to re-experience this, it appears to me as if there was an interplay of self-power and other-power. I believe she is saying that *she* threw it upwards, but obviously no human arm would have the power to throw things up to the high skies. They must have been sucked up into the sky the moment she "threw it" and let go. Thus, it appears to me that when we let go of self-power, the other power comes.

There is absolutely no need to limit our discussion here, using terms of Pure Land Buddhism. I use these terms because these terms are easy to understand and because I was born into a Pure Land family. But since I went to Catholic school from kindergarten to college, I also feel comfortable in expressing the emergence of the sky in this vignette as the guidance of the Holy Spirit (The Holy Spirit *descends* from heaven, so the Holy Spirit is in the skies). Readers can read their own faith into this vignette. Rappaport (2013) has shown how elements of mindfulness are found in virtually all the major religious creeds.

For our purpose as Focusers, I would like to show that there is a more-than-think-ego operating in our Focusing practice. Perhaps we might say that whatever terminology we use, we can observe the workings of a transpersonal or spiritual dimension in our Focusing practice. It would amount to a contradiction if I were to elaborate of how to make space presence itself in Focusing, for such modes of *doing* remain in the realm of the think-ego. Nevertheless, in our *being* a listener, we can be open to, and mindful of, the transpersonal or spiritual dimension about to unfold in our Focusing.

A POTPOURRI

Since much is condensed into this article, more can be articulated about the ways I engage space in therapy. Endeavors akin to my work with space and the think-ego seem to be articulated in different ways in different orientations of psychotherapy. For example, there are some parallels between what I am calling the 'think-ego' and 'automatic thoughts' in cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) resulting in similar practices, as 'distancing' automatic thoughts (Beck, 2011). Moreover, 'distancing' and 'clearing a space' are ways of 'letting go' that is emphasized in mindfulness practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Thus the subject matter of this article is indeed a rich potpourri of Focusing, Clearing a Space, Space Presencing, mindfulness, spirituality, CBT and more.

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MAKING PEACE WITH OUR BODIES: A Paradigm Shift

Katherine M. Kehoe

Eugene Gendlin has pointed out that while the felt sense may not always arise in the physical body, the physical body is where we start to pay attention. As Focusers, we recognize the body as a source of wisdom. Yet in Focusing sessions, we often discover feelings of distrust, anger or frustration toward our bodies. We may notice a tendency to withdraw from our body as a source of pain or shame.

How do we hold this paradox? How do we turn toward our bodies in a friendly way, while also being present with the feeling “my body is not my friend”?

Intrigued by journal reports of people using Focusing with serious physical conditions, I wondered how everyday Focusers like myself, my clients and my students could communicate more successfully with our bodies. That led me to develop a Focusing class called “Making Peace With Our Bodies” as an accessible way to address this question.

In the class, we explore approaches that allow us to sense the body and its issues freshly. This friendly and curious approach, applied in specific exercises and invitations, has been getting some exciting results, and I’m pleased to share some of it here.

I practice Inner Relationship Focusing (IRF) as developed by Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin. For those not familiar with IRF, I offer two definitions that will clarify some of the points I make below.

Self-in-Presence — When we are in Presence, we are grounded, centered, calm, curious, with a broad perspective, able to act in mature and healthy ways. While Presence is the natural state of the Self, it is by no means habitual — it takes practice to move into this state.

Partial selves or parts — In very simple terms, we might think of a partial self as one aspect of ourselves that tries unsuccessfully to carry forward our blocked life force. An inner critic is an example of a partial self, but there are many, and they tend to both compete and collaborate in failed attempts to achieve carrying forward. Successful Focusing with parts requires that we move into Presence. From Presence we are able to hear all the parts without judgment or reactivity.

Accessing the centered state of Presence is the foundation of successfully making peace with our bodies. Only from this state can we have the attitude of friendly, respectful interest necessary to communicate with them.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

With this work we are creating a paradigm shift in our relationships with our bodies. Here are some of the principles that form the foundation of the new mindset.

1. I am not my body: I am *more* than my body.

Just as I am not my emotions, I am not my body. I — from that larger witnessing awareness that we call Self-in-Presence — am *in relationship* with my body.

It is useful to note that just as I am not my body, neither am I my illness or my diagnosis. We often learn to identify with our challenges: I am a diabetic, an alcoholic, an insomniac, a migraine sufferer. Dis-identifying with a condition can give us “space” around it for a new fresh perspective. Instead of saying “I am an insomniac,” I could say (more accurately) “Something in me (or, some *part* of me) doesn’t want to sleep.”

2. I can be completely fine, even if my body is uncomfortable or suffering.

For example, during an outdoor dinner in California last year, I was bitten by small flying bugs. Being very susceptible to bug bites, I was covered with big welts that itched intensely for days. One night, I was scratching so much in my sleep that it woke me up.

As I lay there feeling sorry for myself, thinking how much I was suffering, I heard a quiet, but very firm voice inside saying: “*You’re not suffering, I’m suffering.*” In that middle-of-the-night stillness, I realized that *my skin* was talking to me! And I realized it was absolutely right: *I* was completely fine. It was my *skin* that was miserable.

So I had a short conversation with my skin. I said I was sorry it was in so much distress. I asked if there was anything it wanted me to know. I was surprised to hear it say that it was thirsty. I was even more surprised when, following this conversation, my sense of suffering stopped, and I fell peacefully back to sleep. In the morning I was delighted to find that the overall itchiness was greatly diminished.

Remembering my skin had said it was thirsty; I slathered it with lotion for the next several days. Interestingly, I later read that dehydration can intensify reactions to bug bites. Funny how reading something in print helped validate the wisdom my body had to offer.

When you can make the distinction between You and your body, then you can move into Presence, recognize that you are not the one suffering, and be a friendly witness to the part of you that *is* suffering. You can move from feeling oppressed by your symptom to feeling compassion and curiosity. And from there a way forward can open up.

3. My body is not my enemy.

An uncomfortable physical symptom is not intended to make us suffer; it may be our body’s attempt to communicate something important. But too often, not understanding the message, we interpret the pain or symptom as our body punishing us or being unkind to us.

Not recognizing the discomfort as a message, we often resent the messenger (body), feeling betrayed. It's no wonder we don't feel friendly toward a body that seems to inflict suffering on us.

For many of us, our only response to discomfort has been to try to ignore it, suppress it, or run away from it. Many of us go to great lengths to avoid turning toward what really wants our attention. To make peace with our bodies, we must begin to listen.

When we have a challenging physical symptom or condition, we also tend to have parts with many feelings *about* it. With a heart condition, for example, there might be fear of dying, anger, blame, sorrow, etc. All of these parts tend to have agendas regarding the heart; they want it to go away or be different somehow. And each point of view is important and needs to be heard. Yet with all these feelings swirling around, it may be impossible to hear the heart itself clearly.

By first attending to the voices inside that are scared of it, or angry with it, or worried sick about it, you create a truly safe place for your heart to come and talk about what's going on for *it*. You've let your heart know, "I'm taking care of these other parts. It's safe now for you to talk to me about what's important to *you*." Taking the time for respectful listening creates **safety** and **trust**.

If you find yourself bouncing off into distraction, dizziness, forgetfulness, or frustration, you may be encountering resistance. Oddly enough, when a body part is in distress, there are often *other parts* that *don't* want you to talk to *the distressed part* and actively try to prevent that conversation. For example, in their desire to protect you, worried parts might 'kick sand in your face' by sending fog or sleepiness.

Move back into Self-in-Presence and check inside: Is there a part that doesn't want you Focusing on some issue? If so, assume that *it* is worried about something. Acknowledge *it* and listen with respect to its point of view. Take the time to fully sense its concerns. Once this scared one feels completely heard, *it* will stop kicking sand. And you will recognize that *it* had a good reason for its seemingly hostile stance.

4. My body stores old emotional pain. It may also moderate or conceal uncomfortable emotions.

Our bodies store unresolved emotional material from the past, often carrying issues as physical symptoms or conditions. Bodyworkers report that when they are releasing an area of chronic pain or constriction, it is not uncommon for their client to suddenly experience tears or anger, and/or specific memories may surface.

Connie had endured 10 years of neck pain following a car accident. No medical intervention had been successful in healing the pain. She and her doctors had always seen the accident as the source of her pain, but she had forgotten that she had been in an abusive marriage at the time of the accident. One day, an image surfaced of Connie cringing, pulling her head into her shoulders to protect herself from a barrage of vicious criticism from her former husband. Her conscious mind had been denying this information, but once she

recognized the truth that her body was showing her, her neck pain was greatly diminished. Connie was amazed at how much better she felt after that session. Within a month her pain had disappeared completely.

Serious illnesses can be the body's way of calling for attention to physical or emotional pain from the past that never healed properly. Generally this is something that happened when we didn't have the knowledge, resources, or support to cope with it. As a result the healing process got short-circuited, subsequently showing up as chronic symptoms or acute illness — often years later. No matter how long ago the original trauma was, patient use of Focusing offers a way to bring emotional and physical healing.

5. My body is sentient and able to communicate with me.

The body has its own separate awareness, its own feelings and point of view. This is true for the body as a whole and also for individual parts — like my skin in the example above. If you listen, you may notice that your elbow, lung, and even individual cells have their own perspective, their own knowledge and experience.

Bill had been feeling vaguely unwell. As he acknowledged something in his abdomen that was feeling uncomfortable, he thought it might be his gall bladder. I suggested he check back with his body to be sure, and the response was “yes,” this was his gall bladder. *It* let him know that *it* was holding longstanding feelings of being lonely and unseen, and *it* showed him many memories from his childhood when he had a great deal of family responsibility and received no appreciation.

Stunned, Bill said “I can't believe I'm talking to my gall bladder! Who could have known it wanted to tell me all this!” Previously, he had brushed aside memories from the past, saying, “I can't change what happened, I just have to get on with my life.” But as he realized that his body was still holding these memories, he began to turn toward his gall bladder and his past with new empathy. Not only did his gall bladder feel better, but his attitude toward himself also softened. Family and friends remarked on his new sense of ease and lightness.

While it's true that our bodies don't come with printed owner's manuals, each of us is capable of listening inside and letting our wise body guide us toward greater health and wellbeing.

6. My body has its own language and its own communication style.

The body's primary language is the language of physical sensations. If the body starts shivering, we recognize that it's cold. We crack our shin on the coffee table and pain signals us to avoid the sharp corner. But there are subtle levels of communication that may be harder to recognize. In addition to physical sensations our bodies may use images, sounds, smells, tastes. The communication may come in words or we may receive entire thoughts or memories.

Finding our way to that centered, neutral place of Presence is key to communicating with our bodies. Being Present lets us be curious and alert to the various forms and nuances of our body's language.

In our culture, we commonly ignore, override, or misunderstand what our bodies want to tell us. If you've experienced this kind of minimizing, your body might understandably be reluctant to communicate with you now. But from Presence, you will be able to let *whatever is there* emerge in its own time. Be sure to cultivate patience, go slowly, pause frequently, avoid judgment, and keep checking back to be sure you correctly interpret what comes.

If you want to Focus with your body, **you must s-l-o-w down**. Your body is a very capable communicator *if* you pause long enough to hear it. When you first make contact with something, take your time getting to know it. *Sense...* for the description that fits it best. Do not rush here. Be willing to try several words or phrases before you find a description that feels just right.

This process may take more checking-back than usual. In the same way that you might check back with someone whose native language is different from your own, you might check back with your body: "Are you saying..." or "Is this what you wanted me to know," or "Do I understand you correctly that...?"

Another reason to go slowly is that some body parts seem to operate at slower speeds than others (consider a bone versus the heart, for instance). Play with slowing down to match the pace of the organ or body part you want to engage.

7. Any physical sensation that comes during a Focusing session is relevant and always carries the potential for a life forward shift.

Sometimes a seemingly unrelated physical sensation will arise during a Focusing session. Our tendency can be to ignore this sensation in pursuit of our chosen topic. However, in my experience, nothing that comes is ever a distraction. If you label it that way, you risk missing something important.

When Julia was Focusing about a personality conflict at work, she said that her arthritic ankle had started to throb. Although mentioned merely as an aside, my ears perked up. I know from experience that it's not a coincidence when a symptom speaks up. *Why*, I wondered, would *this* symptom choose *this* moment to act up? I invited Julia to pause and turn toward the ankle with curiosity.

Her ankle was angry; it was feeling stuck, unable to move forward because the path was blocked. Now Julia was able to reframe the personality conflict, realizing she had been in denial about having hit the glass ceiling of gender discrimination at work. Recognizing the real issue brought a sense of fresh air and a renewed enthusiasm for finding a win-win resolution.

Pay attention to bodily symptoms that arise during a session, including itching, coughing, sneezing, feeling suddenly hot or cold — any of these may be your body speaking to you. If you find yourself glossing over a seemingly random physical pain or sensation during

the session, consider that your body is communicating. Try giving this “random” sensation the same attention you would give to anything else that comes. You may be astonished at the results.

8. Even chronic conditions can shift when approached with new awareness: the power of sensing freshly.

The biggest pitfall with pain or any chronic condition is that we tend to objectify it. That is, we give it a label, and then perceive it as something frozen, unchanging. We call it “my pain”, “my multiple sclerosis,” etc., but we don’t come into a fresh relationship with it, and *it* doesn’t shift.

Avoid falling into that trap. Each Focusing session offers a new opportunity for you sense the situation freshly. Phoebe suffered from migraines for over twenty years and thought she was doomed to continue suffering them forever. As she sensed the *whole thing* freshly, in a series of sessions, she found that the headaches came less frequently and with less intensity and shorter duration than before. Phoebe continues to Focus on this issue and continues to experience incremental relief.

Focusers expect that the felt sense of an issue will be something new and surprising. But sometimes what comes in answer to an invitation seems familiar, and you might think there’s nothing new to be known about it. However, there is *always* something fresh to be sensed from the familiar.

In a Focusing session, George said with frustration that all he could sense was the same old low back pain he had felt since having bowel cancer years earlier. I suggested that instead of dismissing the pain because it was familiar, he might turn toward his back with curiosity. When he did so, his back revealed that it was still holding fear, locked in from the time of his cancer diagnosis. George was able to deeply listen to just how scary that time had been. He was amazed at how much relief this brought him. Using a pain scale of 0 to 10, George experienced a drop in pain from a 7 to a 3 in that single session.

When a familiar symptom comes during a session, turn toward it with fresh curiosity and sense how it is *right now*. When you use the word “familiar” to describe something that has come in a session, it’s a signal for you to pause and spend some time there. Either it is familiar because it has been trying to get your attention for a long time, or it hasn’t had enough attention and is still holding some trapped life-forward energy.

SOME SPECIFIC APPROACHES

Openings: the power of specific invitations

Our invitation at the beginning of a session affects what comes in answer. Inviting *whatever wants my awareness now* brings a different response than inviting *the whole thing* about an issue.

Inviting *whatever wants my awareness now about this issue...*

We start by listening to *parts* of ourselves so that we can move into the state of Presence necessary to sense the *whole*. Otherwise the unheard parts create too much static and distraction to get a true sense of the whole thing. So start by inviting *whatever wants my awareness now about this issue*. Try using this invitation for as many sessions as it takes, until all the parts have been fully heard.

Let's say you're Focusing with an ankle that is in pain. With this invitation, you're likely to hear from various *partial selves* that have feelings and opinions about the ankle issue. Part of you may be worried the ankle will never heal properly. Another part may be worried about the medical costs, while another just wants the pain to go away. Yet another may be saying, "Stop being a crybaby — just grin and bear it." AND we're likely to hear from the *ankle itself* as it tells how *it's* feeling and what *it* wants and doesn't want. Listening to these parts without judgment brings relief and clears a space for the next invitation.

Inviting a felt sense of *the whole thing about all this...*

Now that we are fully Present, we can benefit from the power of this invitation. Inviting a sense of *the whole thing* about the ankle injury is likely to get a very different response than simply hearing from a part. What comes is likely to be a metaphor or image whose meaning may not be clear, but it is accompanied by a big life forward shift. This invitation of *the whole thing about all of that* tends to bring a big picture response, not just about the issue itself, but often about how the issue affects our entire being.

Other invitations

When you have an issue that isn't shifting, try a different invitation. For example, Glenda had chronic insomnia despite chronic exhaustion from a stressful job. She spent many sleepless hours reading and journaling. After several sessions, the issue wasn't shifting and she was feeling desperate. Sensing something missing, I suggested, "There must be *some part of your being* who knows what's going on with this sleeplessness! Let's invite that one." To our astonishment, what came was something that said, "We are responding to your intention. You ask for guidance to survive this struggle, yet are so busy during the day you cannot hear us. The only time we can get your attention is during the night." Glenda felt a joyful sense of deep calm. Instead of feeling betrayed by her body's refusal to sleep, she now felt deeply supported, realizing these reflective hours were filling a vital need. She's now rearranging her life to have daytime hours for self-nourishment and enjoying more hours of sleep. And I am now very aware of the power of the right invitation.

In class, I offer students a long list of potential invitations to try, inviting them to sense, "Which invitation feels right for this issue today?" One student told me that this work with the invitations was her favorite part of the class. Try approaching stubborn issues in a number of different ways so that you can hear and witness more of the story.

Working with pain and other physical challenges: the power of “something”

Your first efforts to Focus with the body might come when there is pain. To save time and frustration, don't try to communicate with the pain itself. The pain is being experienced by something alive, so Focus with the *something* that's alive. Say hello to *something* that's feeling pain. Now you have something you can be in relationship with — as in, “Yes, ankle I know it really hurts,” or “I acknowledge there's *something* in my hip that's in a lot of pain.”

Rather than saying hello to a migraine, you might say hello to your *head* or to *something in your head* that's experiencing a certain quality of pain. I have seen Focusers making valiant efforts to stay with pain but not getting any Focusing relief, who then experienced lovely shifts when they turned toward *something* that was in pain.

Remember that you can Focus about physical challenges at any time, regardless of whether you are experiencing them in the moment (think of migraines or asthma). It can be very effective to invite awareness of a certain condition even if you're *not* currently experiencing it. You might have an easier time inviting *all that* about asthma when you're not in the middle of an asthma episode. Once you develop the ability to stay in Presence, it can be useful to Focus even when the symptoms are most intense.

Experimenting — the power of following your instincts

Having established rapport, it's OK to guess how something inside is feeling, as long as you're coming from Presence and not pushing to make something happen. When Focusing with a breast issue, I sensed that my breast was just sitting there, watching me — not shutting me out but not willing to offer anything either. I was patiently listening, but my breast wasn't talking. So I asked it a very direct question: “I've read that breast issues have to do with unresolved rage at our mothers. Are you carrying anger at Mom?” I got an immediate answer, “Of course I am, and it's about time you asked!”

So don't be afraid to ask a question. You may or may not get a clear answer. It might take some practice to sense the best way to elicit information.

On the other hand, sometimes it takes a big dose of patience. Just as you wouldn't try to force any other part to talk to you, it's important to let a body part (or your whole body) be exactly as it is for as long as it needs to be, even if that means being silent. You can simply keep it company in its silence, being available if and when it's ready to talk.

Be willing to experiment and find what works for you. Focusing as a process tends to be flexible and forgiving. If you try something and it doesn't bring a sense of rightness, or if something feels constricted inside, simply step back, pause, and consider what would feel more right as a next step.

VISION: WHAT'S POSSIBLE, HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Ideally, you will find that day-to-day communication with your body becomes a habit. Instead of waiting for there to be a serious issue before turning toward the body,

consider having conversations with it about the lower back twinge when you get out of the car, the bruise on your shin from bumping into the coffee table, the allergic reaction to the spring flowers, the protesting muscles after a workout in the gym, the arthritis in your thumbs... Simply pausing to acknowledge minor discomforts helps to establish a more trusting relationship with your body. To go further, you might even keep a Focusing journal tracking your body's communication.

Making peace with our bodies is truly a paradigm shift, a very different way of perceiving and relating to our bodies. Instead of indifference or animosity, we approach them with respect, gratitude, and curiosity. Instead of insisting, "I'm tired but I need to finish this project," we can pause and sense the perspective of the body itself, as well as something in us that wants to get the work done. From Presence we can listen to both sides, sensing what action might be appropriate and respectful to both.

My hope is that you can develop the same ease in Focusing with a physical ailment that you have when Focusing with an emotional one. Further, I hope you can see the vast potential for healing offered by this approach, both individually and collectively. As we move toward peace with our own bodies, our peace-making reverberates throughout the larger "body" of mankind, helping to create more peace, compassion and understanding on earth.

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Katherine Kehoe is particularly interested in using Focusing to help clients with health issues, and in combining Focusing with coaching to achieve personal breakthroughs. She can be reached at katherine.m.kehoe@gmail.com or (360) 301-2263.

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OPENING DOORWAYS TO THE SPIRITUAL IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Joan Klagsbrun, Ph.D.

Guidance streams through the whole of creation and in any moment we can recognize the form it is taking right before our eyes. Patricia Campbell Carlson

A 52-year-old man delivers such a moving eulogy at his wife's funeral that it gets a 3-minute standing ovation. After writing this eulogy, from the depths of his grief, he becomes aware that writing about meaningful topics might be his new calling. In spite of his financial need to continue his business in order to support his children, he is seized by the experience of a spiritual calling to write, which gives him a surprising new sense of himself.

A 36-year-old woman with breast cancer discovers that by using the process of Focusing in therapy she has had a number of experiences in which she can transcend her circumstances and reconnect with a powerful core sense of herself that feels vibrant and alive. She believes this embodied connection to spirit is what helps her to handle chemotherapy so well. She wants to stay connected to this "essential self," and wonders how to make it a central part of her life.

A 48-year-old woman is diagnosed with ovarian cancer and is tortured by her conviction that the cancer is punishment for having had an abortion a few years earlier. The angry ghosts of her punitive God haunt her. She is not sure whether she will survive, or how to create a relationship with a more beneficent God.

A 72-year-old woman whose cat is the most important creature in her life finds that it has gone blind, due to an illness that includes other serious symptoms. She is struggling with whether to put this beloved life companion down. She feels this as a spiritual crisis...wondering what is the kindest response to an animal that has been loyal to her, but that seems to be suffering most of the time. She wonders if taking the life of her beloved pet could ultimately be the right way to express her love.

These examples from my practice speak to my conviction that treatment for problems in living often cannot be limited to "psychological interventions." Many life issues touch on existential, spiritual or religious themes and a psycho-spiritual approach is what is needed.

In this century, finally, we have a welcome trend toward integrating spirituality into psychotherapy. In the latter 20th century, there was a movement away from the original idea of the psyche — the study of the soul, the spirit, the mind, and the intellect — and towards a narrower emphasis on cognition and behavior. In most graduate training programs until

very recently, therapists have not been encouraged to engage with the spiritual dimension — since that was thought to be the domain of the chaplain, priest, minister, rabbi, or spiritual director. As therapists, we now need to become receptive to recognizing and working with spirituality as it shows up both implicitly and explicitly in our therapy sessions.

What is Spirituality?

I see Spirituality as a state of consciousness, a way of seeing the world that provides a sense of unity and consolation. It is that realm of the timeless that can spontaneously inspire us, comfort us, release us, heal us, and fill us with awe, peace or joy. It is a state of being in which we are seamlessly joined us to a larger, interconnected field that is, in that moment, palpable and alive. A spiritual awareness gives meaning to our lives, validating our existence.

As therapists, a spiritual perspective can help us to recognize, listen for, and elicit the spiritual component in therapy, should it arise. Opening to this larger perspective can be an essential part of the healing process for some of our clients.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some ways to welcome and integrate the spiritual into your therapy practice. I will be suggesting five ways to include this more expansive dimension in your work:

1. To connect to your own spiritual history and to become aware of gateways that open to the larger space for you
2. To explicitly ask about the spiritual and religious beliefs and backgrounds of your clients
3. To include Focusing and Clearing a Space with clients to help them to access a deeper level of experience, and
4. To be the kind of listener who is receptive and can perceive spiritual issues even when they are only implied
5. To notice the positive aspects of our clients' experiences and to bring attention to them

1. Connecting to Spirituality

It is helpful to be in touch with our own spiritual or religious narratives if we are to engage with our clients' deeper sense of spirituality or religion. Often, there are events in life that may be seen in retrospect as gifts of the spirit, perhaps ones that turned life in a particular direction. They may not necessarily be uplifting or joyful moments; they could be times when we have encountered difficult issues, such as a crisis or a 'dark night of the soul' experience. The Sufis have an apt expression, "When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit rejoices for what it has found". And for many of us, it is in moments of crisis and darkness that we tap into spiritual or religious resources that we didn't know we had. We may find connections to something far greater than ourselves. Opening to a spiritual perspective can be revelatory and life changing. The more aware we are of the role of spirit

and the domain of spirituality in our own life, and its meaning for us, the more we will be able to hear the spiritual longings or references to something we might call spiritual, when it arises, either implicitly or explicitly, from our clients.

Everyday “Gateway” Experiences

In addition to reflecting on pivotal spiritual moments or critical turning points in life, it is also useful for therapists to reflect on the kinds of experiences that occur in everyday life when the doorway to something *more* opens. The link or resonance to something larger than oneself might come through being touched or moved by another, through music, the arts, movement, through being outdoors, through religious practices or rituals, through meditation or Focusing or other experiences in which the “larger space” seems to break into our lives. This awareness helps us to look for the gateways in our clients’ lives, and to name them as resources.

2. Welcoming the Spiritual Dimension

Connecting to our own spiritual life makes it more likely that we will hear the spiritual overtones from our clients, and we can also let clients know explicitly that they can speak about spiritual issues. At the start of therapy we might ask, “Has spirituality or religion been a positive force for you, a negative force, or a neutral part of your life?” We want to let clients know that we would welcome both the positive and negative aspects of spirituality or religion, and that this topic may be relevant in the journey of psychotherapy.

3. Focusing as a Doorway to the Spiritual

One method that can function as a gateway to the spiritual is Focusing. Focusing is an awareness practice that has been integrated into therapy for almost fifty years (Gendlin 1969). It is a bridge between lived experiences and deeper meanings, which are accessed through the body. In Focusing, we have a very powerful practice that opens the door to the spiritual by what we call “The Focusing Attitude”. This attitude is a way of treating ourselves — with compassion, kindness, gentleness, respect, reverence and also curiosity — and when therapists model this attitude, it encourages clients to befriend whatever they find within, helping them to reduce inner critical voices, and to access greater self-compassion.

Another way that Focusing opens a gateway to the spiritual is by bringing us into the body, where we can *feel* how we are carrying our problems. An embodied experience opens the possibility for experiencing the physical relief of ‘felt shifts’ — those moments of letting go and transformation that move us in a new direction. The further away from their bodies that clients live, the less alive they are likely to feel. Focusing invites us to pause and to come directly into the body, to experience both ourselves and our situations “from the inside”. Our minds may be racing, but when we come into the body, we naturally slow down and come into the present moment — we move towards “being” and away from “doing”. We’re much more likely to open the door to spirituality from a place of “being”. Coming into the body helps us to be present with ourselves — to be intimate with what we are experiencing. This

intimacy with inner experience allows both the client and the therapist to know the texture and the sensation of what a particular situation feels like, and then, as more emerges, what it means.

Clearing a Space

Clearing a Space, the first step of Focusing, often brings a larger perspective, because that step allows people to unburden themselves, and to then experience how their life would go forward without all those obstacles. Clearing a Space allows people to get underneath their problems. Clients are guided to ask inside “If all my problems and difficulties were resolved, how would I be or what might I find inside myself?” People are often surprised to find spaciousness or calmness or stillness and sometimes a larger connection to something greater. Discovering that capacity to move away from pressing problems and to find inner wellbeing and a greater perspective, even in the face of challenging issues, can be a powerful spiritual resource. As one client remarked, “The process of Clearing a Space is like taking off a very heavy overcoat I didn’t even know I was wearing. I feel free and liberated without it. I’m not going to rush to put that back on.” In the ‘Cleared Space’ when we access a larger perspective or spiritual awareness, we come to see that we have a choice about how close or distant we can hold our issues and how empathic we can be towards ourselves. Gene Gendlin has a wonderful expression that I often share with clients; “You don’t have to stick your head in the soup in order to smell it.” In Focusing we practice how to just give a “whiff” of difficult issues and not be plunged into them. This right distance offers us a larger overview and that can be both freeing and empowering.

4. How to Listen for the Spiritual

Focusing and Clearing a Space are both processes that take clients to a deeper place where access to the spiritual can be experienced. Another way to invite the spiritual into our therapeutic practices is by changing how we listen to client’s issues and narratives. When we are open and receptive to the implicit spirituality, when we listen for metaphors or hold a spiritual perspective, we can help people open to that higher level. What follows are three examples of how I invited the spiritual dimension into the conversation by elaborating or encouraging more from what I heard in my client’s words or non-verbal expressions as implicitly spiritual.

A 20 something male client I will call Ben was complaining about his job. “It’s just soul-sucking, and I’ve got to get out of there,” he said. I heard the word “soul-sucking,” and asked him whether he could say more about what that word meant to him. He replied, “The job feels dry and not particularly meaningful, and in no way am I helping to serve humanity. It feels like it isn’t important work — I am just a cog in a big machine.”

Hearing the phrase “soul-sucking,” I asked if we could pause for a moment, and perhaps he could notice what his soul was truly hungry for?

“What would be soul-satisfying work?” I wondered. What came next were fresh feelings and an inner knowing that surprised my client.

“I guess I need to serve in order to feel like I am a useful person on this planet. I need to really be contributing in some positive way.” And then, “The other thing my soul needs is to be close to the ocean. I want to live someplace that I can go to at least a few times a week.”

“What happens for you at the ocean?” I asked him.

He was quiet for a few while, then said: “It’s the vastness. It helps me to get things in right proportion, because it’s so vast and also somehow calming.”

As he spoke, I could see that something important was shifting in him. Knowing how vital it was for him to do meaningful work and to be connected to the power and vastness of nature was an important step for him. It meant that he would now be more aware of these spiritual values in seeking future work. These insights offered him a life-forward direction, and over the course of the next few months he was able to take steps to finding more fulfilling work.

Ben used the word soul, but many times the language one hears is not recognizably religious or spiritual.

In the second example, a couple I see were having their ritual argument.

She: “I can’t stand where we live. I need to move to the country. I’m so unhappy here.”

He: “You’re depressed. You’d be unhappy anywhere. You’re looking for a geographic cure. I don’t really believe it would make a difference.”

She: “If you really loved me, you’d live where I want and need to live.”

After listening for a while, I asked the woman Susan, “Would you be willing to share with your partner what it is about being in the country that’s so important to you?” She perked up and said, “If we moved out west, I would be able to walk out my front door and not have to get into a car, to get on a trail and be in the woods not seeing another human for 45 minutes. For me this is like being in church — it’s a religious experience.” She went on: “It’s the trees, the smells, I can hear the sounds of the animals. I get refreshed in a way that just doesn’t happen in the city for me”.

I reflected that it seemed to be a sacred experience for her to be in the country. She nodded and seemed to feel heard. I understood that her desire to move had a spiritual component and was not just a way to control her partner or to run away from her problems.

Later in the session, I turned to her partner, Tim, and asked him whether he would share more about his passion for living in the city and what about that lifestyle proved so positive for him.

"You know," he said, "I have two brothers, but they live very far away, and I have got these three friends from college in the city who are like brothers for me. We hang out a lot together, and when I'm in their presence I feel so connected, so relaxed, and I like myself. I feel like we have a tight community.

He turned to his partner: "And their wives really like you, and I know you like them. I don't think we'd have those kind of deep friends if we moved."

I reframed their familiar conflict in a fresh way by suggesting that there might be a spiritual issue here. "It seems where each of you find meaning, sacredness, and joy are different but you actually share a similar need."

The conversation that ensued was softer, without rancor and with more curiosity about how they could find common ground. They had begun to acknowledge their differing needs for spiritual connection and were addressing each other with more compassion.

A third example is about naming spiritual qualities that the client has, that can be utilized in opening to a larger dimension.

A client whom I will call Jane developed some serious neck pain. She had been someone who liked to read and garden. She had a high-powered job and had been a very active and connected person. Over a number of months, as the pain took over her life, she retired and then retreated. She wasn't able to read for long periods of time. She had to curtail her gardening and then stop completely. Understandably, she began to feel more and more victimized by her pain. Her only contacts were with other pain patients, mostly on the Internet, though she also attended a pain support group. Her therapy sessions were centered on how intense the pain was that week, how family members lacked empathy for her situation, and how miserable the lives were of other pain patients who related their narratives on an online chat group for chronic pain sufferers.

"I'm just feeling that my whole life has become filled up with struggle, with fighting the pain. It's always there, and it feels like that's all I've got left," she told me. I asked her if there were any times when the pain was at its worst. "At night," she said, "when I'm alone in the apartment." "And when is it at its lowest ebb?" I asked. "Oh, probably when I go to my (pain support) group," she replied.

I asked her what that was like. "Well, we complain a lot, but sometimes we get into this funny state where we all start laughing." She paused. "And once, we all went out to dinner afterwards." "How did that feel?" I asked her. "It was nice to be around people who understand what I'm going through," she said. She paused. "We're actually really kind to each other. Sometimes I just feel blessed to be in their presence." "Say more about feeling blessed," I

suggested. “Well, we all have become really connected to each other through our suffering,” she said. “And that makes the pain a little less important.”

I reminded Jane that before the pain had taken over her life, she was known to be very perceptive, warm, and an extrovert who loved to be in groups. She recognized those qualities in herself. I asked her how she could have more of that “blessing” in her life, that feeling of connection to others in pain, and she told me she had no idea what she could do. But, within a couple of weeks it came to her. “I’m going to ask the pain support group leaders whether I could be an assistant. They once had an assistant there, and I’ve been there so long I might ask. I think they like me.”

They did accept her offer to assist in the support group, and I noticed that increasingly her life was engaged with helping newer pain patients enter the group. She was engaged on how to best reach certain group members, and I heard a lot less about her own pain, because her identity and her life had expanded. She no longer defined herself solely by her pain and the restrictions that the pain imposed. Her self-esteem increased, and her pain decreased as she felt she was once again making a contribution — was in service to the others and connected to something greater than herself. “I’m still in pain,” she said, “but now it is not all of who I am.”

In mentioning these three clients, it is clear that we can listen for the spiritual without the usual words about God or church, or religion, or even spirituality. Each of these clients was speaking implicitly about some aspect of the spiritual. Ben, the young man, discovered his deeper need to contribute more in his work and to be closer to the natural world. The couple, while not naming religion or spirituality, was talking about where they found meaning and joy. And Jane, the client with neck pain, offered her caring to others, she became more alive and less consumed with her chronic condition. We need to listen for explicit and implicit longing for belonging, for meaning and for joy. These emotions can act as a path to the transcendent — to a feeling of oneness or connectedness. When we do highlight these intimations of the transcendent, we help clients to see the spiritual as an authentic and valuable aspect of their lives.

5. Listening for the Positive

Whatever we bring attention to in therapy is what grows. While the field of psychotherapy has been focused, since its inception, on pathology and on symptom relief, it should not be our only approach. While alleviating suffering is an important part of our work, we also need to help clients discover and amplify the positive aspects in their lives. When a client says, “I had the most special moment with my daughter this week, but anyway, let me get back to that problem we were talking about last week,” I am likely to say, “Please wait, can we stay right there? Tell me more about what was so special.” Then we slow down, and I invite her to notice what about that moment touched her or felt so special. By savoring positive moments in therapy, either moments in the client’s life, or moments shared between therapist and client, we are creating openings for connection or delight or meaning to enter

and grow. When a client has done a deep piece of work in therapy, I try to take time to have her feel how it was to have done something so courageous or hard and to process the good feelings between us. When a client who had been unemployed for three years was offered a position, we spent a good portion of the session on what it meant to him to finally have gotten a job offer. The depth that came from that inner exploration of this positive event revealed that he not only felt his enormous sense of relief, “like a thousand pounds lifted off my shoulders,” but there was something else he could not quite name. I invited him to attend to how it felt inside and what else it meant to him. He slowly realized that while unemployed, he had lost his sense of both justice in life and of hope for the future. Now, he reflected, he once again was starting to regain the sense that fairness and goodness were present again. This made him feel lighter, more whole, more connected to his faith and more deeply at peace.

Often, the positive experience has in it some aspect of the spiritual. Focusing on positive affect can open us to a deeper meanings and can help us experience the wonder and joy and depth that can otherwise elude us. Positive moments in life tend to move us towards more connection, more reverence and more peace.

Summary

The spiritual is an intrinsic dimension of being human, one that can enrich and sustain us during times of stress and suffering, as well as to give purpose to our lives. The spiritual is a *felt* experience during which one has a shift in perspective. It is one of the cornerstones of what it means to be human. Connecting to something more or deeper can provide a profound sense of well-being that transcends our physical and psychological situation. This paper has suggested the importance of acknowledging and engaging the spiritual in psychotherapy. We need to remember that this aspect of human consciousness has a profound power to comfort and to heal, to give meaning to our client’s lives.

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HEARTFELT CONNECTIONS NATURALLY CREATE HEARTFELT CONVERSATIONS

Kevin McEvenue

Heartfelt connection, the felt sense of naturally emerging connecting between two people, can be an anchor in developing a strong sense of self as well as facilitating a stronger lived relationship with others. Heartfelt connection centres at the crossroads of both strengthening the sense of the self and of supporting meaningful, enlivened dialogue between people.

Heartfelt connection creates a living, safe base for each person to feel him/her self more fully as the Self, and for each to experience the 'ME Here' of the self. And heartfelt connection also creates the base for the experience of 'We Here' that emerges in a natural flow towards heartfelt conversation.

In this article I will speak directly from a felt sense experience of a specific event that led to a heartfelt connection with another person, and how that connection opened further into a heartfelt conversation and more. I will share how the whole experience felt, what unfolded as I stayed with the felt sense of that experience, and finally how this experience enhanced further conversations of mutual interest. This event gave me a whole new way of feeling a safe and deepening connection with another person, and changed the nature of exploring something happening between us that was truly creative and supportive of one another. The language here is from my direct experience as it unfolded. The natural unfolding of the form (of the process) is less linear and logical, as it emerges from the felt sense.

HEARTFELT CONNECTION

I can remember the moment when it happened. It felt so new and unexpected. I felt the quality of another's presence touching me in a way that felt so totally refreshing, as though the life in him seemed to awaken the life in me. I could feel his presence affecting my own, but differently from what I am used to. In fact, I am used to feeling nothing. I keep a very safe distance to avoid feeling diminished, shamed or inadequate in some way. I often avoid making connections with others so as not to be pulled into or pulled down by them in one way or another. But in this situation I suddenly felt more...*more me!* That feeling came as such a surprise and joy because it contrasted with my usual feeling of being defensive and protective.

So when I say I felt open to another person's presence and, at the same time, felt more alive in my own body, I am saying that I felt as though I were reacting in an entirely unusual way — the very opposite of my instinctive reactions. I wanted to give this reaction a name as a way of holding my new experience. I called it **heartfelt connection**, a connection that awakened my own presence of what it is to be me, feel me, and love me. It seemed to need to

happen in connection with another person, something I could never have done on my own. Yet I can imagine others might come to this understanding differently, in different ways. Some may feel a heartfelt connection with a tree or a bird or piece of music, something outside of themselves that gives them that sense of the deepening experience of self.

But for me, a heartfelt connection with another person gave me a sense of more me, not less. What a remarkable shift in attitude this was, from the earlier attitude that never wanted to open up and feel connected with anyone. But now, maybe, just maybe, I could find a way to explore a heartfelt connection with *you* (the other person) in order to give me this greater sense of myself that feels so alive, so loving, and so welcoming of others.

As I am writing now, vividly recalling this experience, I am drawn to addressing this other person as a “you” rather than “him” because of the immediate intimacy of our encounter. So my story continues: When I can open up to me as I did just then, I feel very grateful for you being there. I want to open my eyes and look at you and say, “Hi! What is going on in you?” There came a remarkable shift in expectation. My eyes and heart were open to possibilities, but there was also a lot of fear there. The change feels tentative. Do I dare? Dare to want this so much? How can I hold on to it?

Going back to that moment again, I remember how I also want to know more about *you*. I want to know what is alive in you, too. I feel alive in me, and now I want to know how you are. What is going on in you? The word that comes to express all these felt remembrances is **spacious**. I seem to have an abundance of space in me to make room for you — just the way you are. I feel a kind of grounding in myself in the knowing that I will not be pulled off center as I make room for you. I can still stand on my own two feet and just be present to what is going on in you. I like that.

This way of being with myself, standing my ground, opens up the possibility of a conversation with you. I really want to make a lot of space to welcome that. Going back to that moment and allowing that felt sense of it all to come freshly, that connection between us, it feels so physical: my body is expanding and connecting to something that feels met. It feels like there is more room for both of us to be present to ourselves and be present to one another just the way we are, not more, not less. So there is a kind of back and forth quality that seems to happen between us, me and then you, and then more me and then more you. That might be all that is needed now, just the feeling of heartfelt spacious connection between us, that spaciousness that seems to be bigger than both of us.

As I feel this heartfelt connection between us, I seem moved to look around beyond us, enjoying the environment surrounding us. My eyes seem more open and alert. Because I can feel your presence, I seem to have more desire to look beyond the periphery of my vision in a way I am not used to. My eyes seem to be able to float from one thing to another without feeling constrained or held. And I seem to be able to take in other things, things that are happening around me and between us. Right now, I am seeing the garden beyond the trees, the sound of the birds. I have room or spaciousness to just enjoy the sounds, the light and the texture of my surroundings. Those external events outside of me, including you, seem to enhance my own sense of me. I suddenly appreciate these clumps of ferns over there as though they have a life of their own. They seem to be almost growing taller as they

are blown by the wind. It is like the life in ferns are being felt in me, and I am feeling more alive too! I like that.

In this moment of writing, I want to come back to this lovely moment of heartfelt connection with you. That is how it began, and now in this moment, sitting in my garden writing, the feeling is coming back to life again. I am noticing my environment, the life around me that supports me but which I usually don't take in. Now life feels more three dimensional; I am so much more engaged rather than just taking in information flatly.

This experience feels different, and it awakens all my senses: my sensitivity to taste, smell, my skin, my visual centers, my nervous system, and especially my sense of well-being. Suddenly my arms and legs want to stretch out to their full extension spontaneously and effortlessly, taking even more space, more physical presence, a sense of '**me here**'! There is a sense of '**we**' here now! I love that.

HEARTFELT CONVERSATION

All of a sudden I become aware that I am in a **heartfelt conversation** already. Here we are together, sharing a conversation with one another, and I didn't recognize what was happening. I was feeling a connection with you, and didn't realize we were already in a conversation about something.

(Here I switch back to 'he' and 'him')

Up to this moment, I have been sharing a story about something in my own life that I feel passionate about. The felt sense of my partner is right here. I can feel his presence actively supporting me, which seems to help me move through the whole thing and stay with it until I am done. From time to time he adds something from his own experience that enhances mine, helping my experiences to move forward and even expand upon them. I am so appreciative of feeling so heard and feeling his support each step of the way as my story unfolds.

But then there comes a moment when I feel like I want something else, something more from him. So I ask him, "What is going on in you right now, as I tell you my story?" I continue to feel my partner's presence keeping me in such close company, but I am also curious to know how all this is affecting him. His response is very warm and supportive and really adds more to what I am experiencing and deepens *the more* as he shares parts of his own life that seem directly connected to where I am. I do feel deeply supported. But then I suggest something that is quite out of the box. "Is there something happening in you, connecting to your life separate from my story?"

He pauses a moment and says, "Well there is *something there*, and it didn't seem at all connected to you so I dismissed it. What came unexpectedly in me showed me a very different picture of where I am in this situation! There is something else happening in me, as I was listening to you. There was this thing you said about relationships and how you are more a one-on-one kind of person, and not really comfortable with the dynamics that often

happen in a larger community. But in myself came something quite different. It was like a light turning on! Oh! I love that sense of community! That is me, not Kevin.”

He said he felt a little hesitant to share this part because my reaction was so different from his own. He said he didn’t want to pull me off track, but in truth he realized, “I feel a delight in a small group community which brings a sense of excitement and promise for me!”

When I heard that, and when I took the time to take in his meaning and fully receive the way he gave **that** back to me, something really expanded dramatically in me. My whole body came alive in heightened possibilities. It is true; I am not comfortable with community as such. But when he said he was comfortable, and how he took delight in his own sense of community, somehow I got it; at least I got that his sense of community could somehow live in me, too. What had come alive in him seemed to open me up to the unknown that seem to want to stretch and expand my limiting world view. I said that I noticed what felt so alive in him affected me too. His words awakened something in my own body right here, as I pointed to my body.

My revelation came as a kind of shock to him because he could feel in his body my sense of heightened possibilities. More was happening between us now, and the feelings were palpable. We were both acutely aware of a door opening that felt like a mutual and deeply connected space between us that seemed so much more real, and so much more personal. Clearly, this *aha-connection* was a very **WE** moment between us happening right here, right now, at that moment and...we knew that there were even more possibilities ahead emerging for both of us.

We seemed to really be able to listen deeply to one another, from that authentic place inside us. He was alive to himself, and I was even more alive to myself. There was a back and forth sense of connection between us. It was like our two worlds seem to open up and coexist with one another. Neither of us were collapsing onto the other, dominating, or trying to mirror the other. I could feel the life in him, the whole of it, a sense of him of having a separate life, separate from me, experiencing something very different than what I might experience, but which opened up possibilities for me that I might be able to expand into in my own way. I realized this profound connection was a gift to me. My life just expanded its possibilities of finding ways of being in community in ways I could never have imagined until I was able to touch into his world in this way. It was as though the life in me touched the life in him but differently. This is about a shared life together and what that might feel like, how two worlds can coexist and complement and enhance each other’s possibilities in a way that would not have been possible for either of us to do alone.

The entire experience felt so good, so heart warming and so fulfilling. My heart remained open, and I felt so grateful for having this conversation with my friend. I want more of this, more of this **heartfelt conversation** about many other topics that we might like to explore together! Maybe this is what it means to feel *met*, not only met but *matched*. As my friend said, ‘toe to toe’.

HEARTFELT CONVERSATIONS THAT LEAD TO *MORE*...

As I reflected on those moments of heartfelt conversation with my friend, I realize there was a similar quality in another conversation with him in which the subject matter was completely different, but I noticed and welcomed the contrast.

Looking back, we realized that we often conversed like this together — openly and spontaneously. This time the topic was about the role of a Focusing Coordinator. He'd asked earlier, "What is a Coordinator's role now, given the changes in the structure of our evolving community?" As he asked the question this time, I was able to hear him differently; I could feel the many deeper layers of meaning for him and why he might be asking this question. I felt a new spaciousness with a sense of appreciation of the complexity of his wondering, that I hadn't experienced before.

And then I asked myself a similar question, "What do I think the role of a Focusing Coordinator is, given the changes going on in our community?" But my response to the question brought me to a very different kind of place than my friend's. For me, the question was not so much about the present as about the past, and how I remembered the early discussions of the duties and purposes of a Focusing Coordinator.

His question, on the other hand, was about *now*, what was happening *now*, and I really welcomed the freshness of his wonderings. I saw that we were coming from different, but complementary places on this subject. I was able to fill him in more about the unfolding history of the Coordinator's role, and its origin and purpose as I saw it, which led us to noticing the many evolving steps into the current definitions today. His next question seemed so appropriate to ask, "Where does it want to go now? What are the next steps, given all that came before?" He offered a lot of new possibilities regarding where things might go now that I had never even begun to think about!

Throughout this conversation there was a genuine mutual respect and spaciousness to explore each other's experience and fully hear each other. For him it was *all about...now* and *new possibilities* that are available, given his experience of community building. For me it was about *now* and also *back then*, a dual perspective which opened up so many more possibilities than the fixed ideas that I had held before. Suddenly, because of this shared experience, I began to realize there are many more possibilities for new directions around the question of the role of a Focusing Coordinator. We did not have a solution, nor did we need to arrive at one. We had a heartfelt conversation and that was enough. Again, this sharing is an example of a heart-to-heart conversation — a conversation that would not have been possible unless we were both grounded, in a solid sense of ourselves, and hence able to make room for one another and our differences.

CONCLUSION

Heartfelt Conversations, like Wholebody Focusing, begin with coming back to our *self*, finding our own grounded presence, with a sense of self separate from anything else, so that I can have space in me to have room for you and visa versa. Grounding needs to be there. We each have to be solidly based in our own lives, each standing on our own two feet.

Paradoxically, that sense of ‘ME HERE’ arises when we take the time to first feel a connection with another person. I want to feel that I am not alone, and that someone else is *here*. I don’t have to get caught up in ‘other’. (In fact I would run away if I felt as if I had to take all of that on). I just need to know that I am not alone. Something about not being alone opens my body up to being grounded in myself, especially if I sense that the other person also knows the importance of both of us being grounded. Then I can find myself and feel spacious, while supporting that sense of self and spaciousness in the other person, as well. Then the experience feels *met, matched and mutual!*

Others may have different ways of coming to a *sense of self* that works differently for them. Our unique organisms instinctively search out various ways that they need to connect with themselves. But every organism needs to connect with something outside itself in order to find itself, how to be, what to do, in order to find its own ground, to find its own place in the world, and a sense of its own belonging.

In the same way, I need the grounded presence of other persons in order to know and grow myself. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin once said, “A person grows as a person in connection with another person and in no other way.” **Heartfelt Connection** and **Heartfelt Conversation** attests to the truth of that thought. So be it!

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HIDDEN TRAUMA: A Personal Story of Living with Dyslexia

Jeffrey Morrison, MA, LMHC

This is a story about a trauma no one sees. It is a family story, an educational story, and a Focusing story. It is also about taming harsh inner judgment, holding one's deep shame tenderly, and finding one's gifts next to the wounds.

In the fall of my senior year of high school I began my search for a small liberal arts college to attend. I had not been a stellar student. In fact, school had seldom been a place where I felt good about myself. I did however have some confidence in talking about myself even though I was by nature shy and introverted.

I was interviewing with the director of admissions at a small college when he leaned forward and said to me, "I just want you to know that your SAT scores don't mean that you are mentally retarded."

Despite all my struggles with school, I knew I was not mentally retarded. Standardized tests were difficult for me, as was anything to do with reading. My high school French teacher told me to come back "once I learned English." Even my mother sent me off to college encouraging me to "date women who can spell."

How I realized I was dyslexic

It wasn't until my daughter Kelsey was diagnosed with dyslexia that I read the book, *Overcoming Dyslexia*, by Sally Shaywitz, M.D., and had one of those "aha" moments in which my childhood and educational struggles began to make sense. I too, am dyslexic. I have since recognized that most adults come to this realization about themselves only when a child is struggling in school and is diagnosed by a specialist. My daughter had always been a very confident child and engaged student. When reading became the center of learning in first grade, she changed. Unable to keep up and perform with the rest of the students, she became anxious and developed stomach aches. My wife Esther, an elementary school teacher working in the same school, knew something was not right, but was told just to "Read at home with Kelsey, and she will be fine as she is so smart and capable in so many ways." For my wife, this was a bit insulting as she read to our daughter every day of her life!

I would like to emphasize the traumatic nature of what was happening for our daughter and the impact it had on our family. Teachers are not trained to recognize dyslexia, and the services needed to treat it do not exist in schools. The consequence is that schools often look the other way when a child exhibits dyslexia, because simply to suggest to a parent that a child may have a disability leaves the school legally responsible to do something about it. Fortunately, the reading specialist who was working with Kelsey spoke to my wife and

handed her the book *Overcoming Dyslexia*. Thus began a long journey of learning and seeking out the best care and interventions for our daughter — services that, unfortunately, are not available to everyone.

It took us more than a year to discern what sort of testing, evaluation, and interventions were needed. This process was incredibly frustrating, time consuming, expensive, and stressful. Eventually we found a wonderful organization, complete with educational counselors, to help us. We also discovered that Kelsey was allergic to gluten, dairy, and eggs. When bi-weekly tutoring and a new diet were in place, things began to change for the better.

How is dyslexia a kind of trauma?

Trauma is an experience or experiences that overwhelm the organism. If what was implied could not occur, the organism becomes blocked and begins to shut down and or seek out new behaviors in an attempt to carry forward experiencing.

Being able to learn how to read would carry forward a life process for a child in first grade. When the implied sequences of being able to read do not occur, the organism adapts in predictable trauma responses of fight, flight, or freeze. Anxiety, depression, illness, and behavior problems begin to form as a way of coping with the blocked or stopped process. These very behaviors are attempts to solve the problem that the stopped process presents, but they don't carry forward the life process beyond the stoppage.

Imagine everyone around you being able to do something important and you cannot. In fact the harder you try the more frustrated you become and the further behind you fall. You cannot see what it is others are doing to be successful, nor is your teacher able to explain anything to you other than to encourage you to “keep up” or practice more of the activity that you are unable to do in the first place. All you can experience are your failed attempts to solve the problem. Over time, this situation generalizes into other learning experiences, the way you see yourself, and what is possible in your world.

Dyslexia and neuroscience: a very brief overview

In Shaywitz's (2003) work, she found:

As virulent as any virus that courses through tissues and organs, dyslexia can infiltrate every aspect of a person's life. It is often described as a hidden disability because it was thought to lack visible signs, but dyslexia is hidden only from those who do not have to live with it and suffer its effects.... We now know exactly where and how dyslexia manifests itself in the brain.” (p. 4)

The diverse symptoms of dyslexia, such as trouble reading, panic about reading out loud, problems spelling, difficulties finding the right word, mispronouncing words, and anxiety about rote reciting from memory all stem from a single isolated flaw. At the same time,

other intellectual abilities such as thinking, reasoning, and understanding are all untouched by dyslexia. This adds to the problems of diagnosing and understanding why some smart people can't read.

Recent research has developed a model of dyslexia based on phonological processing — in short, the brain's ability to process the distinct sounds of language. According to Shaywitz (2003), dyslexia is intimately tied to: "A specific component of the language system: the phonological module. The word phonologic is derived from the Greek word *phone*, meaning sound." (p.40).

The phoneme is the fundamental element of the language system. A person learns to read by looking at a word and converting the letters into the distinct sounds or phonemes. For example, the word *cat* is sounded out as three phonemes: K-aaa-t = cat

Different combinations of 44 phonemes comprise the English language. Those who are dyslexic have difficulty both storing and retrieving these sounds. When they are asked a question, they often will retrieve a word that is similar to but different from the one they are attempting to say. Being unable to see a printed word as something that can be broken into smaller parts and combining different sounds — let alone retrieving them in the correct order — compromise reading ability.

Children who are dyslexic perceive a word as an amorphous blur, without an appreciation of its underlying segmental nature. They fail to appreciate the internal sound structure of words. (Shaywitz, pp. 43-44).

Brain wiring and functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) research

Functional MRIs show that dyslexia is the result of:

A glitch having taken place during fetal life, when the brain is hard-wired for language. As a result, the tens of thousands of neurons carrying the phonologic messages necessary for language do not appropriately connect to form the resonating networks making skilled reading possible. (Shaywitz, pp.67-68).

Learning to read means being able to break words into their sounds. When normal readers do this, their brains correctly store the printed letters on the page with the corresponding sounds. When they see the word again, they are able to retrieve and link the letters and the sounds and speak or read them silently to themselves. Dyslexics need to be taught how to do this, or they must suffer through years of trial and error. Studies demonstrate dyslexic readers develop neural pathways that are different from those of normal readers. Whereas reading becomes an automatic process for more than 80 percent of the population, 20 percent of us must develop a manual process of building our neural pathways through intensive therapies and years of repetition.

My daughter's therapy began with her reaching into a bag to find a plastic letter, feeling it and letting a picture form in her brain, and then saying and hearing the sound of that letter. She had tutoring with an educational counselor twice a week for a year, and then weekly for another two years. She has maintained a high grade-point average through middle school, due in part to her determination to be seen as normal and successful. She needs a great deal more time than most kids her age to complete assignments, help from her older brother and her mother.

I remind her I never did that well in school and that she will always have to outwork others just to keep up. I also remind her that she has other talents, gifts, and creative outlets that allow her to shine; such as dance, art, creative writing, and an amazing ability to implicitly understand human interaction as well as explicitly express that awareness, sometimes to my great chagrin. Through her experience of learning to read and manage her disability I have been able to reflect on just how dyslexia interferes with being normal. Not trusting your abilities, or even the ability to know what you're missing, invites anxiety and depression. One disconnects from self as a way to manage overwhelming feelings.

Interaffecting family and personal history

It may seem odd to include family history here, but there is a context in which every situation occurs. I am a mixture of biology, a constellation of family members who carry their own history, and something uniquely more. As you read the following, do keep in mind/sense the context that I grew up in, noticing particularly the intergenerational and vicarious aspects of trauma.

My paternal family:

My paternal grandmother began her career as a schoolteacher and went on to be involved in literary circles in New York as a poet. My paternal grandfather grew up on a farm in southern Illinois, taught in a one-room schoolhouse, and eventually went on to complete his Ph.D. in education at Columbia University. He became an assistant commissioner of education for the state of New York.

My father, an only child, skipped two grades, which he handled academically, but which left him at a loss socially. He went to college at 16, and graduated at 19. He began active duty in the Navy just as World War II ended, and then attended Harvard Law School where he experienced receiving a grade other than an A for the first time.

My maternal family:

My maternal grandfather was a successful contractor in Michigan. My maternal grandmother was a co-founder of a local Planned Parenthood and a homemaker. My mother was adopted and was an only child as well. My mother earned a masters degree in education and taught until I was born.

I was an only child until my brother arrived when I was four. I grew up with love, a big back yard, and a belief that I was important and of value. Perhaps more than anything else, this belief supported me through years of suffering through grade school, high school, and college. Nevertheless I felt a pressure to carry forward the family tradition of education, excellence, and teaching. However, education was an area of life in which I felt ill equipped to succeed.

My struggles as a student

In my living room hangs a picture of me as a small child, painted by an artist my parents knew. I am perhaps three or four years old, wearing a suit, and looking intently at a book on my lap. It is what I was raised to be, but not who I was.

Books were overwhelming problems. I liked pictures and wandering outside exploring the world. When friends would spend lazy summer days reading and sharing comic books, I would flip through the pictures as if I were reading. I taught myself to look as if I were reading so as to not draw attention to myself.

Early on in school I struggled. Reading, writing, and spelling were a disaster. If I had a dollar for every hour I spent staring out the classroom window lost in a daydream, I could retire. I can still feel the panic of waiting my turn to read out loud in our low-level reading group. Thank goodness for math and science. I saw my first school psychologist in third grade. She asked if I liked school, and I remember thinking to myself, “Does she really think kids like school?” Perhaps some did; I preferred building tree forts.

My fifth grade teacher loved having us take dictation. It was a perfect combination of all the skills I lacked. I had to listen to what was being said, retrieve the words, try to imagine what those words looked like and figure out how to spell them. I fell behind immediately and never recovered. I began to get stomach aches and missed much of the end of the school year.

My sixth grade teacher had us write a story each week. I liked creating stories and learned I had good ideas, but I needed a great deal of help from my mother with my spelling and grammar. My teacher noticed my difficulty with spelling, writing, and reading. He referred me on for evaluation, which determined that I was rather bright, but below grade average in spelling and reading. I was just happy the test confirmed that I wasn’t dumb.

Somehow high school became a bit easier. My English teacher passed me along without requiring much writing. I listened well in class to the books being discussed so it seemed as though I was reading them. I had some other successes that encouraged me. I discovered that I was an excellent baseball player, and my success on the high school baseball team improved my self-esteem as I experienced approval and even applause for something I could do well.

I went to college and thought I would study economics. My father thought I would make a good investment banker. I soon realized I was not well prepared for academic success. I did not have my mother’s editorial support. I remember many unhappy nights with an old manual typewriter, correction tape and a dictionary. It is hard to look up words that you

have no idea how to spell. I felt lost, alone, and depressed. I began to fall behind, eventually failing out of school.

It was a dark time in my life. I felt like a failure and yet a kind of curiosity about myself seemed to emerge. Before I left that school, I took a psychology class and a philosophy class and enjoyed both. A kind of self-reflection and personal meaning began to develop.

After a year off and some soul searching, I found another school and my niche. I became a philosophy and religion major with minors in psychology and art. It seems funny that what saved me was a full load of reading and writing papers (often turned in late). Many dyslexics find success a bit later in life, after they have found what they are passionate about. They can learn and master the language of their specific interest and begin to thrive.

My new college was small, personal and had some of the best teachers of my life. I had a religion teacher who taught me existential philosophy, religion, and to seek the meaning of my own experiences! I had never before encountered education as an exploration of self. No one in school had ever expressed interest in what I thought or experienced. Something in me mattered? Something in me that wanted to be expressed was worth pursuing, writing about, creating through sculpture or movement? My favorite professor, Howard Johnson, saved my life. We read Heidegger in his office, had long talks, and Dr. Johnson often reaffirmed my intrinsic self worth. Tears fall as I remember him.

So much of my life that had been blocked found a way forward during this time. My philosophy professor taught me how to present an argument and write a thoughtful paper. My psychology professor became head of the counseling center and allowed me to co-lead a support group. My art teacher allowed me into the sculpture studio to create whenever I wanted. His wife taught me contact improvisational dance. It was a good time in my life. It felt good to just be me!

My transition to the “real world” after college was difficult. I did not know what I wanted to do other than hitchhike from coast to coast and explore — which I did. I had avoided all the career counseling offered at school. Eventually, I returned home to the Pittsburgh area. I read an article in the newspaper about a class taught by a graduate student at Duquesne University. It talked about existentialism, client-centered therapy and something called Focusing. I took the class, and it changed my life. I had found a practice and a process that allowed me to tap into my rich inner life. The Focusing teacher, Les Brunswick, mentioned a graduate program in psychology in Seattle. I applied and was accepted into Seattle University and their Masters program in Existential Phenomenological Therapeutic Psychology. A new chapter in my life began.

Learning Focusing is a different kind of education

Although I had worked in the therapy field since 1986, it wasn't until I began my private practice in 2000 that I decided I wanted to study Focusing more deeply. I found a Focusing partner who was studying with Ann Weiser Cornell. I began regular trips to

California to study with Ann and became certified in 2006. I appreciated Ann's clearly articulated teaching and certification process. As I learned the deeper structure of Focusing, I encountered the deeper structures of my own being and how I learn. I was able to more fully trust my own experience and to be gentle with myself when I struggled. Focusing allowed me to unwind many tangles, fear, and doubt. My confidence that I could have a successful private psychotherapy practice grew slowly. I also saw the positive results my clients were experiencing as I integrated Focusing into how I worked.

In 2011, I began Shirley Turcotte's program in Aboriginal Focusing-Oriented Therapy and Complex Trauma — a land-based, indigenous, and experiential perspective of trauma. Shirley has a big personal story and uses it to teach from. As I went through the program I kept searching for my story. I was able to see bits and pieces but was still not be able to put them together. It wasn't until I was asked to take notes at a meeting that I said, "Now you'll all get to experience *my* PTSD and trauma."

Still, it took a while to really see more deeply into how I held myself back, and what I needed to turn to so I could become the warm kind of Focusing teacher I wanted to be. There it is...that word...**teacher**! It still scares me. I am more comfortable saying I'm a therapist who teaches Focusing. There was something in the process of putting myself out there as a leader in the educational process that required coming out of the shadows of my learning disability. I knew I had to be able to speak and write in order to interest students in my Focusing-Oriented Therapy Training Program. So I pressed on.

Speaking from my story

Recently, I gave a talk to the Seattle Counselors Association on Focusing and Trauma. I began with my own story about how my dyslexia contributed to my disconnection from self. I used my and my daughter's stories to introduce how to work with embodied, vicarious, and intergenerational trauma. The talk was very well received and satisfying for me. I have come to realize that my experience as a dyslexic has its own trauma story. It is my story, complete with wounds and gifts and wonderful teaching examples from which others may learn.

If my wound is a disability that prevented me from being educationally successful when growing up, and twisted my own notion of self-worth, what then is the gift? A gift is what often comes from our response to our wounds. It is what got us through and allowed us to heal from and overcome our trauma.

One gift I have come to realize is my ability to sit with someone in his or her darkest moments. I will doggedly pursue them even when they want to abandon themselves. Another gift is a certain persistence and repetition I can sustain over long periods for both myself and in my work with others. I am realizing that my organism's painful response to being dyslexic has given rise to deeply enlightening connections with others. As my terror of being a pretender has diminished, my courage to pursue my goals has grown.

Shaywitz suggests (2003) that many of the most creative and successful people are dyslexic. She believes it has to do with not being able to simply memorize or do things by rote, but rather to get far underneath the concept and understand it at a fundamental level. In many ways, my dyslexic brain is wonderfully suited to the study of philosophy and the experiential process of Focusing. Where most reading brains speed along on a super highway of the left hemisphere, mine meanders on back roads and dirt pathways on the right hemisphere crossing over at times to the left. This allows for little side trips of imagination, crossing and dipping and making it my own by deeply experiencing the concepts.

What best-selling author John Irving and I have in common:

We both had SAT scores under 500. Neither of us can spell. We both discovered we were dyslexic when one of our children was diagnosed with the disability. What got him through high school was a wrestling coach; for me it was my success as a baseball player.

Shaywitz quotes Irving saying that in writing, being dyslexic has become an advantage. “In writing a novel, it doesn’t hurt anybody to have to go slowly. It doesn’t hurt anyone as a writer to have to go over something again and again.” (p. 347).

The worst thing for Irving was being called lazy. As dyslexia is a hidden disability, people wrongly assume that if you are not achieving it’s because you’re lazy and your own damn fault. What they don’t see is that a dyslexic has to work several times as hard as non-dyslexics to achieve the same results. Once they develop the needed stamina and gain confidence in their abilities, this diligence pays off.

Author and shame researcher Brené Brown says that courage is the ability to face one’s shame in a way that allows you to do what you really want to do. Our shame is a placeholder for our trauma. Go there and you will find the wound and your gifts. It is not an easy journey.

Focusing has given me a way of being with and interacting with my experience, helping me to unwind my tangles, blocks, and shame. Healing is a journey of recovering bits of the fabric of our being and weaving them back together to reform the whole. Focusing has given me a way to encounter my many hurt parts and to know which ones to pick up and weave in and which to let go. Focusing has also connected me to a supportive community with many encouraging teachers. It offers me a different kind of knowing — one that comes from felt sensing and learning to listen deeply inside to what my organism gathers implicitly.

I gratefully realize that I do carry forward my family’s tradition of education in my own unique way. I can even call myself a teacher!

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THE EDGE

so vast, this detail
we enter,
crossing heaven and earth,
here
in my belly

is everything:
my specific everlastingness
held
intimately

by your responsiveness.

Suzanne L. Noel

SAFETY

I am not afraid of waterfalls.

Take me with you

When you cry.

Suzanne L. Noel

CO-CREATING A NEW RESPONSIVENESS: Healing Trauma Through Focusing Partnership

Minda Novek

Focusing Partnerships are fertile opportunities for growth. For trauma survivors, such Partnerships can provide powerfully transformative ways of being in the world, both internally and externally. Like a pot-bound plant, whose roots take up so much space and energy that the rest of the plant stagnates, a trauma survivor may feel stuck in a space that he/she has long outgrown but cannot escape. Focusing Partnerships help the trauma survivor create a wider, more open space to live in. Partnerships can provide the essential nutrients of acceptance and an environment for Felt Sensing that allow the survivor to grow beyond the limiting confines of the past.

For any Focuser, a Partnership does not replace the beneficial experiences of Focusing alone or with a therapist, but it can complement them, particularly for a trauma survivor. In a peer-to-peer context, Partnerships provide a multitude of benefits: They can offer a quiet, receptive space in which to discover and give expression to an unfolding Felt Sense in the presence of another, letting what is *sitting inside* take form, and be safely felt and heard; when this unfolding happens, the Focusing Partnership is a revelatory, satisfying process. For some, being patiently listened to and accurately heard is, in itself, a unique experience.

A Partner's presence helps remind the Focuser that his/her self is separate from the content of the situation being attended to. A Partnership can provide the chance to *Be With* hard or seemingly unknowable issues without criticism, expectations, or corrections — from oneself or one's Partner. A Partner helps to amplify awareness, as well, around all that is taking place, so that the Focuser can build a new reservoir/resource bank of accessible and sturdy process and a deeper understanding of content. The Partnership can become a safe platform for relational healing from which to experience trust, develop self-confidence during interaction with another, explore new avenues of flexibility, and begin to take further Life Forward steps.

A Focuser stays in touch with a newly forming Felt Sense as it develops from within and brings a *Focusing Attitude* (patient, attentive openness, without expectations or pre-determined goals) to what might unfold. She/he learns to keep company in a bodily-felt way, to find the right closeness or distance in relation to what is going on interiorly at a particular time, and to *Be With* what comes in a non-judgmental, unbiased way so that the Felt Sense can unfold. This is more than simply spending time with something. The process is a compassionate way to *Be With* an issue, a feeling, or the Felt Sense that emerges, and is key to creating the space needed for something alive to grow inside — something truly felt, yet newly formed.

Further examination of issues and benefits for the Focuser in a Partnership, particularly where there has been trauma, includes: **The Presence of Trauma, Communication**

Issues for Focusers with Trauma and their Partners, Beginning a Partnership, *Being With* and the *Focusing Attitude*, Active Partner Participation, The Companioning Partner's Experience, After-Session Conversations as a New Way of Relating, and The Focusing Partnership as a Resource for Relational Healing.

The Presence of Trauma

For a Focuser with trauma, visiting hurt places inside without merging with or exiling what comes is especially challenging. The Companioning Partner can model and reinforce the uncluttered openness of the *Focusing Attitude* and the compassionate support of *Being With*. Through repeated visits into this kind of interaction, a Partner can help a Focuser with trauma to stay compassionately present with himself/herself long enough to experience the Felt Sense of relief and safety in the body, to find accurate language (or other handles) for the bodily feel of what comes, and to steadily hold a condition of receptivity as more unfolds. As the Partner reflects back, the Focuser may notice a greater complexity to the situation being explored. The Felt Sense of an experience can now include the Partner's reflection, the interaction between the two Partners, and a sense of relief, as the Focuser's *state of being* expands beyond the starting point of the session. The Focuser's self feels larger than the issue.

For any Focusing Partnership, there are crucial factors that need to be considered by the Focuser and Companioning Partner. For a trauma survivor, both partners need to take into consideration the impacts of trauma in order to help the Focuser develop beyond those impacts. For an effective interaction to take place, the Partnership must involve some essential commitments, and Focuser and Companion both need to be patiently open to taking risks within the agreed upon boundaries of that relationship.

Revisiting unprocessed traumatic content without sufficient resources might possibly result in a degree of re-traumatizing. One way to reduce the chance of the Focuser merging back into the old content is to Focus on the *bodily feel* of the issue — physical, vocal or imaged expressions of the energy that arrives with that content. Another important component is to provide grounding by stating something concrete about both Focuser and Companioning Partner being together *now*, in the present moment, in the present space. The calm presence of the Companioning Partner encourages further processing, and a feeling of relief as the tight hold inside lessens. Even when content is not shared, an acknowledgement of *something* that cannot yet be voiced is helpful. The trauma survivor's sense of isolation and loneliness with these hard issues and invasive sensations can be eased by the Companioning Partner's "witnessing." The Partner's *Being With* presence may even make it easier to revisit hard places, bringing an added level of safety for experiencing such content.

Communication Issues for Focusers with Trauma and their Partners

The delicate balance in Partnership, particularly during early Focusing interactions, is increased when trauma is present since the Focuser may bring to the Partnership much habitual distrust. For trust to develop, an understanding of the Focuser's communication requirements and preferences needs to develop. The very process of expressing those needs

is an important part of healing for the Focuser. Those with trauma often develop strong defenses for dealing with recurring past dismissals, judgments, scorn, blaming, punishment, shaming, denials of his/her own experience, and redirecting towards fear or guilt. Reactive forms of self-protection and self-blame become ingrained responses to repressive treatment, interfering with healthy interaction in later relationships. At the beginning of a Focusing Partnership, such disruptive feelings can be easily triggered by a Partner as the trauma survivor begins to enter into the precarious territory of self-exploration in another's presence.

By his/her very presence, the Companioning Partner is an advocate for openness in which not everything has to be shared or said aloud. By *Being With* the Focuser during the session, the Companioning Partner enables the Focuser to *Be With* whatever may come, whether it's a flood of words and images, a manageable stream, or even just silence. Content need not be addressed directly; selective expression can still allow for resonating to take place. For example, the Partner can resonate: "So there's a long silence here, and a deep sigh." For some, sounds of assent or brief inter-comments such as, "Yes" are helpful. For others who may be hyper-vigilant, reactive, or otherwise overly attendant to other people's attitudes, even the sound of another's voice or any comment can disrupt a Focuser's tenuous connection to a Felt Sense.

We all have learned patterns of human interaction. Past interactions can be replaced and reinforced by the positive interactions in a Focusing Partnership. However, for some traumatized people, ingrained habits of response to outside negative influences can at first misinterpret *Being With* as *Being Messed With*. For them (or anyone for that matter) who is dealing with trauma and therefore easily reactive to others, any misrepresentations, charged words, even sounds, that don't accurately reflect what was said, can be a cause for problematic interactions.

For example, a Partner's suggestion to enter a bodily-felt awareness can feel like a frustrating distraction, invasion of privacy, or misdirection of attention. The Focuser can feel, "There are hurting places needing my attention and he/she is pointing me elsewhere." Even reflecting back can be experienced as disruptive noise. For a Focuser highly susceptible to triggers, the Partner's comments can feed into that activated bodily state, or past traumatic scenarios. Even brief inter-comments or sounds of acknowledgement such as "mmmm" can be disruptive. If the Partner says something that triggers an activated scenario, the Focuser's reaction may be explored. The Focuser needs to communicate that so that both parties learn techniques for how to get beyond that kind of impasse. Trust can be established through successes, but also through a genuinely shared exploration of failures, and in ways that feel empowering and safe, not confrontational or interruptive. Even when the Focusing Companion reflects back somewhat inaccurately, the reflection can be helpful if the Focuser feels fully empowered to correct the reflection, and can experience the Partner's encouragement of that correcting process. Many, many times growth comes from such correcting of mistakes in reflection as the process of asserting what feels right for the Focuser strengthens and furthers the rightness and opens up a next step.

For the Partnership to work, a Focuser with trauma needs to be able to ask for what's needed, or at least, to express an instance where something is not working, and to take responsibility for finding what will work. Co-creation of the relationship requires both

parties to be committed to a real possibility for growth. A Focuser not yet able to delineate needs can still explore these difficult situations in order to better learn how and when to ask for a specific kind of support. The supportive interaction with one's Partner gradually replaces past disruptive experiences.

The Partnership can be risky as a place where the Focuser with trauma can be triggered in many ways, but it can also be a place where she/he can learn *the feel* of safe Felt Sensing and even begin to repair the broken process of interaction with others. If the Focuser has internalized those old deterrent responses in a self-directed continuation of abusive past interaction, the Companioning Partner's non-judgmental presence can serve as a reminder that the Focuser is entitled to compassion and opportunities of growth.

Where trauma is involved, Focusers and their Partners need to allow much room for trial and error to work out their co-created communication. Something that has been "denied" for the whole span of life may now need some new elements in order to transform various and complex feelings into a qualitatively improved experience, as it unfolds. The process continues within a session, and in an ongoing Partnership, over time, until the Focuser and the Partner both trust the process — and each other! The challenge is to find a safe way into the Focuser's process, a method for jointly making space for something new to be heard, both internally and externally.

A sense of freedom develops for asking for what is needed or expressing difficulty as it comes up; gradually, past experience of disruption can be replaced by the new Focusing Partnership model. Part of this new model depends on the Partner's ability to hold open a new kind of spaciousness for the Focuser. On the Focuser's part, honest expression of confusion, self-doubt, expectation of judgment, and other difficulties shifts from being part of a problem in communication to part of the journey to healing solutions.

For many of us, there is often a feeling of not being able to say to others what is going on inside: perhaps the Felt Sense is too vague, too slow in opening up, too conflicted, too embarrassing, too frightening. There are so many ways any of us can develop a fear of direct expression and a doubt in the validity of our own thoughts — and even more so, for a Focuser contending with trauma — where communication has been severely damaged. Trauma victims have often experienced a sense of never being heard, being cut off prematurely, being punished for expressing feelings, being laughed at, or always being told what to think or feel. Countering those traumatic feelings may require many rounds of repeated experiences where the Focuser feels safe and strong enough to assert boundaries for the Partner. These boundaries can be renegotiated or made more permeable, as trust is established, and as a Partner shows sensitivity to the Focuser's needs.

Partners take turns Focusing. Both parties concentrate on the needs of the one Focusing. A trauma survivor may be chiefly concerned with taking care of others and be uncomfortable considering his/her own needs, especially ones that compete with those of another. Maintaining an inner focus of attention is hard because a person with trauma may find it particularly difficult to be the center of attention, without the customary method of escape through deflecting attention to the other. The Companioning Partner offers the Focuser the opportunity to notice this tendency, to let go of much of their concern about the

other and to bring the caring presence to his/her self for a change. With enough room, he/she can learn to attend to what's going on inside rather than be drawn up in concern for other's state. In addition to this new kind of spaciousness, there is a built-in acknowledgement of the importance of safety and of a somewhat flexible set of boundaries. Setting time limits for the session (or pausing when feelings overtake the process) may help the Focuser tolerate these new forms of attention from the self and the Partner. If the Companioning Partner intercedes in unhelpful ways, the Focuser can learn to articulate preferences since these are expected parts of the Partnership process.

Focusing Partnerships can help to normalize difficult experiences, issues, and feelings. The Companioning Partner *holds a space* open for the Focuser where she/he can safely *Be With* the hard or nebulous things/parts that need attention. The Focuser's own way of articulating such difficult or inchoate content is reflected back in neutral tones. Whether the reflection is in one's own words, or in those of the Partner, hearing it said back aloud creates enough distance to sense how accurately the "thing" was heard. Once the Focuser feels accurately received in this non-judgmental, non-corrective space, there is room for *something new* to come. Of course, communication is not a perfect process. But if both Partners are able to hold that intentional space open, the process of exploration can withstand a certain amount of mistakes, forgetfulness, etc. To some extent, the Felt Sense of being listened to determines what gets heard versus what gets re-activated. The Focusing Companion can help reinforce a sense of importance to the Partnering experience itself as well as to the Focusing process.

The Focusing Partnership structure offers a sense of safety, if the Focuser feels that there is room to set boundaries and to articulate communication issues. Then he/she can experience a new kind of space, an inviting space of partnership which does not demand that any specific results follow. The space assumes that the Focuser can develop a trust and an expectation of reliability by exploring the generous properties of safe communications. Even if the process doesn't lead to a complete shift, the Partnership space enables a sense of fresh experiencing, a workable method for exploration, relaxation, and the hopeful gratitude for what comes when the *internal space* around an issue *is larger* than previously perceived. For some, the act of experiencing gratitude is transformative enough in itself.

Beginning a Partnership

A preliminary conversation may be helpful in setting ground rules for the Partnering interaction to take place. These agreed-upon basics need to be based upon the steps and concepts of Focusing, which allow a new Felt Sense to develop and be attended to. For an experienced Focuser, aware of the ways trauma impacts his/her process, supportive conditions with a Partner can be articulated quickly. For a less experienced Focuser, the Partnership arrangements require some time to adjust to or to articulate further needs. For a Focuser with trauma, the range of needs may shift as the Focuser's level of comfort or reactivity is impacted by a particular issue or impactful event. The Partner needs to know that he or she can always request feedback regarding any specific or altered needs that surface during the unfolding Focusing process.

A Focuser with trauma around communication can request quiet, or reflection, or help with Clearing a Space, or another form of response from the Companion Partner. It is in the freedom of the shared relationship *to ask*, and in the asking, a certain kind of trust begins to be established. Another crucial factor regards how the Focuser experiences the Companioning Partner's attention — that is, does the Focuser feel genuinely listened to and accurately heard? Process-skipping to solutions, advice, or palliative measures, may only disconnect the Focuser from being in better touch with the Felt Sense. As the Focuser asserts his/her needs and experiences the Companioning Partner as providing what was requested, the Focuser can find a growing confidence in his/her own ability to heal and in the Partner's responsiveness.

Being With and the Focusing Attitude

The ability to *Be With*, for most of us, needs to be recognized as possible, acknowledged as worthwhile, and then be repeatedly cultivated and practiced. Often an altogether new learning is needed. The Partner can model the qualities of *Being With* and the *Focusing Attitude* towards what comes up. This process enables the Focuser to learn what the *Focusing Attitude* feels like through example, through need, and often through trial and error. The Focuser continually re-experiences the compassionate acceptance of the *Focusing Attitude*. As this fresh experience of *Being With* is recognized and appreciated, its place in the Focusing session grows more meaningful. *Being With* one's Felt Sense while another person is *Being With* your process of exploration offers an opportunity for a Life Forward movement to take place. The Focuser with trauma is increasingly open to new ways of experiencing, without the frozen reactivity and built-in filters of the past keeping things static.

In a Focusing session, a Focuser's Felt Sense of *Being With* can include what is being *Focused on* and what it's like to *Be With* 'that' at any point. In a Partnership, the Focuser also experiences a Felt Sense of how the Partner is *Being With* his or her process. The Felt Sense of being listened to by a Partner can impact what the Focuser himself/herself "hears." The partner can help the Focuser stay in the present — especially when dealing with feelings like anger and fear — by modeling the *Focusing Attitude*, enabling the Focuser to go inside and hold a steady and safe place *there*. Learning how to *Be With* triggered feelings at a bodily-attuned distance and with an attitude that ensures safety and self-empathy, while *tolerating* uncertainty, requires an ability to dip in and out of content. This dipping allows the Focuser to safely gain a body feel and a larger perspective of "the whole of it," (rather than falling into it) that comes from the Focusing Process itself.

A Partner, continuously holding a *Focusing Attitude*, can offer the Focuser alternative experiences of a new language and new logic to meet newly unfolding needs. There is great relief to be found in creating a safe space together where the unknown, the resisted, the resented, the frightening and the confusing can surface at a safe distance with a language and logic to meet it as needed. For example, a handle can be found for parts that are stubbornly vague or unapproachable. The Partner can acknowledge the validity of that language, even if the vocabulary is preverbal, gestural, or expressed silently. As the Focuser learns

about awareness of the Felt Sense and safe ways of *Being With* it in the presence of a Partner, further change occurs, however gradually and subtly, in his/her way of experiencing.

Active Partner Participation

A Partner's reflections can offer further opportunities for growth. Often, by the conclusion of the session, a new Felt Sense has formed for the Focuser of the whole situation and how it is felt in the body. This *state of being* can be now experienced and accepted with new awareness. This shift can bring a sense of relief and also serve as a new Handle for future exploration.

Each new facet of change adds to the effective complexity of the Focusing process for the Focuser with trauma — the Partner's neutral yet supportive presence, the gradual improvement in communications between the Partners and consequent lessening of guarded behavior, the loosening of hypervigilance in sessions by the Focuser as his/her Partnership Companioning needs are recognized, discussed and successfully met.

The Partner can become a steadfast witness, putting aside judgment, expectations and ownership of the moment to support the Focuser's finding a way to *Be With* what is there. Such witnessing is a brave and valuable act in its own right: supporting another's being present in the moment and *Being With* — safely, and intentionally. When the Partnership relationship works, the Focuser has a real opportunity to stay true to her/his own process, leading to improved interactions with others. Even when a non-Partnership interaction is difficult, there is now a growing Felt Sense of what is missing. Attending to that Felt Sense can encourage new opportunities for greater openness.

The Companioning Partner's Experience

The largely one-sided aspect of this Partnering model is tempered by the fact that the Focuser in turn becomes the Companioning Partner, and in doing so, learns to meet the expressed needs of the fellow Focuser. Sometimes, too, the specific content of the other person's session can resonate with the Partner's own life experience. The Companioning Partner is also learning a wider range of interactional skills, as well as a greater awareness of his/her own issues. For example, the Partner may sometimes recognize an impulse to interject, to sooth, and otherwise interact with the Focuser in ways that interfere with the internal Focusing process. Attending to the Focusing Partner's needs can help the Companion Partner develop a greater consciousness of his/her own process as well, improving his/her ability to *Be With* both within the Partnership and in life in general.

After-Session Conversations as a New Way of Relating

During the Focusing process, the relationship between the Focuser and the Partner adds another level of relating. This level can be explored either during the session, or in an after-session conversation. A good deal of addressing Partnership-related difficulties can be adjusted over time with discussion. Hopefully, Partners will continue to maintain a *Focusing*

Attitude even in a discussion that takes place outside of a session. The trauma survivor can continue to practice a healthy assertiveness and feel Forward Movement in the expression of his/her needs without fear of abandonment, rejection, dismissal or derision due to feeling the Partner is still *Being With* him/her. Partners can also develop between themselves a familiarity with, and at times, a shorthand language for referencing past experiences, family dynamics, conditions at work, and other subjects of attention in the Focuser's life.

The Focusing Partnership as a Resource for Relational Healing

A Partnership provides the Focuser with a unique opportunity to reach an understanding with another person around how to evolve an interactive process that works for her/him. As the trauma survivor experiences healthy interactions in the Partnership, self-confidence grows stronger. A Partnership can help establish, or reinforce, a bodily-felt sense of safe interaction. Even after Partnered sessions, the Focuser may remain in process, recognizing triggers, and bringing self-compassion during moments of stress. In crisis situations that arise for the Focuser, the spaciousness and supportive qualities of a Companion in Partnership may serve as a healing resource. The Felt Sense of this healing resource can help to build resilience and diminish the impact and duration of trauma once triggering has occurred, and even, to some extent, reduce the frequency of occurrence.

Healing for the trauma survivor comes *through* the process rather than at the end of it. The original trauma *interrupted the ability* to process experience and feelings. But what has been fragmented in the past cannot be put back together from only broken parts. A replacement is needed, and that must be created from, and in, the newly formed present. A Focusing Partnership helps the Focuser transition from that sense of brokenness to new inner resilience and to more grounded ways of being with others. The impact will most likely be felt gradually, but with each successive experience of relief co-created with a Partner, a Focuser may explore more expansively, strengthening the ability for conscious connection inside and with others.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank my editor Zena Goldenberg and the editors of this journal for their advice and support during the revisions of this article.

Minda Novek is a Certified Focusing Trainer and a Bio-Spiritual Focusing Teacher. In addition to Focusing alone and with a therapist, she has sixteen years of Partnering experience, including two ongoing long-term Focusing Partnerships. She is also involved in a long-term peer study group that brings the Felt-Sensing process to Eugene Gendlin's A Process Model. She can be reached at mnovek@optimum.net

LIVING COMMUNITY WELLNESS FOCUSING: How It Can Become Part of Any Program

*Patricia Omidian, Ph.D., Nina Joy Lawrence and Melinda Darer,
with Patti Panzarino and Nasser ben Hassen*

Focusing International and other Community Wellness Focusers are carrying forward an essential part of what Gene Gendlin and Mary Hendricks Gendlin see as the mission of Focusing in the world. We are finding ways to live so that Focusing is welcomed into structures that already exist and spreads by the daily work of other organizations.

How do we live Community Wellness Focusing? What do we do in our everyday lives so this work becomes part of what is happening in our communities? One loyal member of our Community Wellness monthly phone gathering, Mary Elaine Kiener, says, “Each one of us in our own way is creating space for wellbeing.”

Here are three projects in process, all sponsored by Focusing International. Nasser ben Hassen lives and works in Tunis, Tunisia; Patti Panzarino in Massachusetts, U.S.A.; and Patricia Omidian is currently working in Monrovia, Liberia.

NASSER BEN HASSEN’S STORY

For many years of teaching English as a second language, I have always struggled with the first class meeting. “Getting-to-know-you” wasn’t an easy activity for me. A few years ago I started learning Focusing under Dr. Patricia Omidian and began to realize that things could be very different inside the classroom. So the room has become my “House” and the students my “Guests” (borrowing Rumi’s metaphor of the Guest House). Letting the students know they are my guests, with all the connotations of respect, distance, and acceptance, is worth the thousands of words that I used to say to try to clarify the kind of contact / rapport that I hoped I could establish with my students.

My students used to get upset when they dealt with new language systems or skills. Now their whole attitude towards learning new things has changed because I emphasize something that I once heard Gendlin say: *‘Learning is thinking and thinking is what you don’t know’*. There is always something missing which they are in class to *‘touch’*. I usually suggest that they sense — in the centre of their bodies — what *Something* means, in addition to their intellectual understanding. Then some silence comes, deep breaths, smiles, eyes light up as though they are seeing something fresh and amazing. Sometimes I ask them to close their eyes if they wish to and check to see if there is *more...* and there is always something new.

Focusing is deeply rooted in Arab as well as Muslim culture. The Quran says, ‘God will not change the condition of people until they change what is in themselves’ (ar-Rad 11), which is quite similar to what Gendlin (1981) says in *Focusing*: ‘Human problems are by

their very nature such that we are each inherently in charge of ourselves. No authority can resolve our problems or tell us how to live' (p. 6). Also, in surat Ash-Sharh, 'For indeed, with hardship will be ease. Indeed, with hardship will be ease' (5-6). The phrase is said twice to emphasize the role hardship plays in our growth. And Ann Weiser Cornell (2014) wrote in *Treasure Maps to the Soul* (p. 2) 'We found ourselves saying that the most difficult areas of life were treasure maps to the soul'. When I met Ann and Barbara in the Treasure Maps Seminar in Amsterdam in April 2014, they were surprised to learn that what they had discovered in their deep Focusing practice was already written in the Quran.

Knowing how much Focusing fits in their culture, my students feel 'safe', grateful, and comfortable with the process. They share their stories with me, sometimes very private stories, and I listen with curiosity. Being aware of the important role of the individual to carry forward positively, I adopted a 'Guided Discovery' technique in which students could experience language as a learning process using what they feel in their bodies as well as their intellectual mind and rely on themselves, not the teacher / authority. It's really useful that students be in contact and share what used to be invisible in them and take responsibility for their learning.

Change is happening in me as well. I am no longer the boss. I am the curious companion and listener who acknowledges *what's here now*. I offer empathy, respect and positive regard and receive them on the other hand. Now, I am aware of the Part in me that is burning to see me reading and studying as long as possible, and the Part that does not want to do that. I used to be identified with both Parts almost all my life. Now, after a few years of learning Focusing, I am still with my Parts, but no longer overwhelmed. I have become a hard working teacher, and I have taken a number of courses — and have been doing very well. And I'm carrying forward very positively. I'm noticing how my life is changing magically.

Focusing has showed me that students don't come to the classroom only with their books and pens. They also bring with them lots of their feelings, wishes, and experience. If they are given the opportunity to be with what they already have inside of them without judgment or objections, a new society will come up after centuries of 'exile'.

My plan for the future is to spread Focusing among the teachers and teacher trainers in Tunisia. I've suggested that the Ministry of Education adopt my project to build a network of Focusers who could integrate this skill in our schools. I'm waiting for their reply.

EMPOWERING

Nasser brings Focusing to his daily teaching in ways that fit so well culturally that the students are comfortable. Focusing helps empower them to learn a new language. It may become so effective that the Education Ministry considers incorporating Focusing skills in their training.

The next story is from Patti Panzarino, Ms. Wheelchair Massachusetts, 2012, who experienced Focusing many years ago with one of our Community Wellness pioneers and Focusing International Board member, Anna Willman. The experience stuck with Patti and

led her to begin work to become a trainer. She wants to make Focusing available to the community of people dealing with disabilities.

PATTI PANZARINO'S STORY

Sometimes I feel like I am a juggler. Sometimes I feel like the conductor of a huge orchestra, making sure each part is playing on the precise notes it needs to be and as loud or soft as it needs to be. Other times I feel like a fragmented computer with different thoughts and feelings swirling around some personal cyberspace. Most times I feel like the captain of a huge ship, keeping it on course by making sure passengers, crew, and family are all taken care of and happy. And all these feelings come up on a normal day. You see, I am a woman with a disability. I am an employer, not because I manage a corporation, but because I need care 24/7 and recruit and manage my own staff. I wear many hats. I am a wife, manager, advocate, sibling, friend, and daughter of two very elderly parents. In my own quiet space reside many parts. I used to try to keep them quiet or ignore them so I wouldn't have to face many of the feelings and battles that go on inside of me.

Recently I started training to become a Certified Focusing Trainer. I have almost completed level I. I received news that my 91-year-old father had a stroke, followed a few hours later by the news that my 87-year-old mother needed a heart procedure. The timing of these two events could not have been more perfect because the news came during one of my Focusing training sessions. I don't know how I would have handled the week I needed to spend with my parents in New York without Focusing skills.

On a normal vacation, traveling overnight requires more preparation for me than the average person. I reschedule personal care attendants so one can accompany me and pack respiratory and other equipment that is required to make me comfortable and functional. Then I add the normal every day tasks of choosing outfits to bring and fitting everything in a suitcase. All of this compounded the stress and apprehension I had as I faced a week of long days in which everyone (my parents, husband and care persons) depended on me.

I remember being scared during that time to practice Focusing with one of my trainers; I thought I might just break down and cry because of all the stress I was going to have to handle. However, in my quiet inner space there appeared something like a giant bulletin board with many pieces of different colored paper, each representing a feeling or obstacle I would have to endure. My Focusing partner asked me what it would be like to pick up just one of those pieces of paper and give it attention. Naturally I picked an easy one that told me I was safe. This choice allowed me to recognize all of the other parts that would need my attention, at one time or another.

Focusing is a very healthy and useful tool especially during stressful times because, rather than repress parts of myself for fear they would overtake me, in my quiet space I can give them acknowledgment and attention so they do not become like children screaming to be recognized. Taking a pause a few times a day during that week gave me much needed peace. I became 'friends' with all my different parts which made me be a better wife, daughter, personal care aide manager, and advocate for my parents. I am very grateful for Focusing. I'm

looking forward to learning more and more about it — and the different parts that appear in my quiet space — and I want to take it into the community of people with disabilities to help them go forward with multiple feelings and challenges in their everyday lives.

CO-CREATING

You have just seen Patti's expertise at dealing with challenges common to the community of people living with disabilities. She will be much more effective in teaching Focusing in her community than someone who doesn't have her special skill set and knowledge. To meet the needs of her community, we co-create new ways of Focusing training that fit the specific culture. As Patti learns Focusing skills from us, she teaches us many things we need to know, such as how to adapt language so it speaks to her community instead of turning them away. We learn to adapt timing for differing energy levels. We are sensitized about the issues that may come up with the possible presence of caregivers during training.

Focusing International offers community wellness for people living with disabilities. If you are interested, contact us by going to focusinginternational.org/en/contact-us. We will have on-going Community Wellness Focusing training groups for this population. If you want to contact Patti, she invites you to email her at mswheelchairmass12@comcast.net with any interests or questions. She is willing to share how Focusing has changed her life and how Focusing has helped her with the daily challenges she faces as a person living with a disability.

This next section is the moment-by-moment unfolding of Dr. Patricia Omidian practicing her profession of medical anthropology. You will be able to see how she brings Focusing into a work plan that did not originally include Focusing. This story is pieced together from emails, Skype conversations, and Facebook reports during Pat's contract with the World Health Organization (WHO).

PATRICIA OMIDIAN'S STORY

July 28, 2014 Announcement on Focusing International website

Dr. Pat Omidian, medical anthropologist and Co-Founder of Focusing International, is one of several experts being sent to Liberia to work as part of the WHO team combating the epidemic there. As a medical anthropologist, Pat's job will be to gather information on local practices, particularly those that hinder the spread of Ebola. She will also look for ways that traditional practices may help spread the disease.

Pat is also tasked with assessing psychosocial issues in the communities affected by epidemic that could help medical personnel respond to the outbreak. She will be generating a series of recommendations to improve communication, outreach, and responses to this deadly outbreak that kills 61% of its victims.

July 28 Skype call, on arrival in Monrovia

I met the psychologist from International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and we want to coordinate, both of us really interested in resiliency and positive deviance, looking for the healthy practices that are already present locally. I'm hoping I can work with her and the social mobilizers and do some resiliency work.

July 29 email to Community Wellness list

Hi everyone, I need to Focus, and I need a partner. Most of mine are currently asleep, or already into their day. (Ruth from Israel got in touch quickly).

July 29 email after Focusing...

Just being with the [inner] guest that wants to be with people in a kind way helped me the most. I think I was feeling like I could not be warm and be myself. I just cannot touch people. And this is a country of people who like to touch and be in physical contact.

July 30 Facebook report

Someone told me today that "Ebola is a disease that can only be stopped by not being kind. We are told to not touch our sick loved ones. How can we not comfort someone we love?" But to touch someone who is ill with Ebola can be the death sentence for the caregiver. That's why there are so many deaths and illnesses among health care staff. I am meeting many brave people.

August 3 email

I start my interviews tomorrow but will go and meet with a Christian church today to get permission to run some focus groups, a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. I am working with two young people, free since the university is closed for a month because of Ebola.

August 5 email

Community surveys are working well, but I have not figured out how to include Focusing in them.

Aug10 Facebook

Hey everyone, I am just starting my 3rd week here in Liberia. The people have been wonderful. I enjoy local staff at the office, internationals working with us, and other groups we meet in the communities. This is an amazing place where Christians and Muslims are working together to solve problems. I hope it can remain this way. Meanwhile, Ebola is

spreading rapidly. People are starting to be more cautious. The problem is that one can KNOW what to do but that does not mean that one will DO it.

August 18 email

It looks like there is a good chance that I am coming home as planned and then after two weeks coming back here to do psychosocial wellness stuff. Right now I have a report to give. I sent a note to the WHO head (WR) and he liked it and told me to send it forward. I did and next thing I know I am listening to someone tell me about a meeting where their working points exactly matched what I had written.

August 18 Facebook

The key is to listen...Finishing up my last week. Will leave on the 25th but have a ton of work between now and then. And I learn over and over again how important it is just to listen to people, to hear their fears and be with them. It's about being human with them.

August 21 Facebook

I cannot believe that I leave Liberia in just 4 more days. I am pleased that the presentation at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare was well received. This country has a long way to go before Ebola will be stopped.

August 22 email

How many UN offices does it take to get an anthropologist out of a country in West Africa? At least three country offices, and one regional office. And, as all of this is going on, they are working to get me back into this country, too. If I had energy I would just keep on working through another month, but a break and some different clothing would be nice.

August 24 Facebook

The Ebola outbreak is a crisis beyond belief. There seems to be very little international will other than "containment" but in truth, the world needs to help or thousands more will die. This is worse than war!

August 26 email

So the news is...I had a ticket finally from Monrovia to Ghana. Turns out they did not pay to hold my ticket and so it disappeared. So now I have a ticket to the US, but not out of Monrovia. Stuck. I feel exhausted. I did not expect to be so down by the news, but I really did want a break. No ticket to come back to the US. So I am getting another four-week contract and will do work on psychosocial wellness here in Ebola-stricken Liberia.

August 30 email

Bad news about the Ebola — into Senegal now and predicted to hit 20,000 cases before it's under control. The numbers are finally realistic. Some of us were saying that their estimates were crazy, but it's clear now that Ebola is going to rival the 1918 Influenza pandemic. It's still a disease spread by touch, not airborne, so that is a blessing.

September 2 Facebook

Started the new work on psychosocial and community involvement. The world needs to pay attention. This outbreak will only grow and engulf more countries.

September 2, 5:00 AM Skype chat

I hope to do some Focusing but the days are so very long. It is so odd because it can feel very good here — and then reality hits. Example: a body lying on the street with people walking around the person (dead or still alive). I have not learned the art of managing these realities. It is harder than dealing with beggars in Pakistan. How to show humanity and not be infected...or endanger others?

My colleagues and I start psychosocial support training next week. I will be teaching some basic Focusing to social workers and mental health workers. Because this is also a training of trainers, we hope that this group will continue the work of training others.

September 3 email

I can insert Focusing into what I do but not teach it by itself. Yet it is exactly what is needed. Next week we do a PFA (Psychosocial First Aid) that is so much like our Afghanistan trainings. I think I will start with the "Pause". If I use just Pause and Listening I have the basics of Focusing.

Trying community mobilization and it's working. People like being listened to. Some estimates of how many people could be affected show numbers over 10,000 by end of this month and could go as high as 200,000. We actually have no idea about the actual numbers right now. There are bodies left in the streets, on the beaches, in homes that are not even counted.

September 5 email

Story of an empowered community! One of the doctors in an Ebola treatment center wrote the following to our internal WHO list. (The sprayer is the person in the treatment center who sprays anything contaminated by Ebola with strong chlorine and water mixture).

MESSAGE FROM THE DOCTOR

“As for the treatment center, I am glad to report that 18 patients are negative for Ebola as of results obtained on 4th September 2014 and of these, 16 are true cures from EVD (Ebola Viral Disease)!!! This includes one mother of a two-year old baby boy who has managed to stay healthy throughout his mothers’ illness. I wonder if he was not already immune to the Ebola. His father died of Ebola before the mother fell ill. This little boy used to mimic the sprayers with the drinking-water plastic sachets, which he would use to spray the health team! And he would also shout “Sprayer” every time any of the team members called for a sprayer!

God is good all the time! Let the success stories begin!”

Warm regards,

September 5 2nd email

I think that with supportive care the death rate would drop to under 30%. Most people die of the consequences of severe dehydration. The death rate is high because we cannot get everyone into care.

September 6 Skype audio call

It’s almost a miracle how much difference Focusing makes. One of my psychology friends said, “I saw you were almost in tears as somebody told their story and I thought, ‘oh, oh, you are going to need help’.” But you know, I don’t want to not-feel. And the woman who told her story let me know afterwards that she so appreciated that I really heard her.

It’s so sweet; the people here bought new linen for the hotel and all the used linen they are going to donate to the Ebola treatment centers. That’s really community wellness, people helping each other.

We found the positive deviant!! We found a woman who figured out on her own how to care for Ebola patients; she has helped other people care for their loved ones and not get Ebola. She uses locally available materials to avoid infection; a long sleeve shirt, plastic bags, soap, water and fire. An infection control person found that it’s been done before in other outbreaks. But we can’t scale up until we get approval from home office. We have some doctors that are absolutely adamant that Ebola has to be treated in a specialized hospital or at least a holding center, where infected people can go until there is a place in a hospital for them. This method avoids infecting the whole household. At the last meeting somebody said, “You know, the whole city is a holding center! We’ve got to quit pretending!”

There is no disease that isn’t affected by community processes. Every disease is. We community people have been saying that, and finally some of the doctors are agreeing.

INVITATION TO YOU

Reading Pat's experiences as they unfolded, we have just been with her, sensing her way forward using Focusing along with all her other training. She finds community allies, and begins building a program that includes Focusing, always collaborating with the other workers and community people.

Each of us is creating a space for wellbeing in our own way. We pause and wait, beginning to identify what is needed and how to create it together. We would love these stories to encourage you to look around you and sense if there is some community in your life where Focusing would fit.

None of us has to work alone. We can reach out to each other and grow something together. On a recent monthly Community Wellness phone meeting Ruth Hirsh noticed our calls are examples of living the process of community wellness. We can show up just the way we are, with whatever we are holding and get the caring support we need for our work and ourselves.

Acknowledgments: We want to thank our excellent guest editor, Donna Varnau, who helped us refine what we wanted to say and caught many glitches we didn't even know we had made! She was so wonderful to respond so quickly when time was short.

Focusing International is dedicated to supporting social change through community and psychosocial wellness as a way of helping people empower themselves by blending Focusing practice with local culture. We support people in difficult, unjust, or overwhelming situations to work together to develop and spread resiliency. We have seen how human beings thrive when they are emotionally safe, and free to shape their communities in healing ways that hold significance for them. Our systematic approach is grounded in the philosophy and therapeutic experience of Focusing and in an appreciation for the strength and resiliency embodied in local culture and traditions. For more information: www.focusinginternational.org.

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AN ODE TO FOCUSING, PEACE, LOVE AND ALL THAT JAZZ

Lyly Rojas, Ph.D.

The Focusing Institute is in transition just like the weather, the planet, humanity. Like you and me. There could not be a better time for Focusing, for peace, for love and all that kinda jazz to help us become clearer or clear-ish when the foggy thunderstorms of life are surrounding us on every front.

As I see it, the great gift that Gene Gendlin has given all of us is Focusing as a *democratic* practice meant to heighten inner peace even amidst the most un-peaceful situations. Focusing, employed as such, can allow the world itself to nudge closer and closer towards that elusive *Peace on Earth*.

Democratic is the defining word here. Rather than seeking out a Madison Avenue branding firm or hiring an army of PR agents to make him the next hot ticket “Psychotherapy Superstar” whose work would be destined exclusively for the well-heeled layperson or for the professional establishment, Gene did something unheard of: he gave his work away. Gene generously made it available to anyone and everyone through what we all know as “Changes Groups.” He offered the co-evolution of Focusing to all of us long before *Open Source* became a business model.

I surmise that as a child caught up in the winds of War, he wanted people to be “free” of all the implicit and explicit inner messy stuff that makes hate of self and the acting out of the hate of others, possible. The other side of fascist or racist or terrorist or all the other *ists* that lead to War is awareness, understanding, affectionate attention or simply, Love.

Love. Focusing to me has always been a respectful, loving moment where whatever is held by the body and its aura, memories, rages, somatizations, pleasures, pains, poetry — its traumatic this-es and surprising thats-es — can be held in the warm embrace of a safe interaction-in-the-body-and-with-other space. Whatever our Larger Body has to say is listened to. As Zen meditation teacher Thich Nhat Hahn says, “To love is to listen.” In Focusing, Gene leads us to listen, newly and deeply, with all our ability to be present to our fears, our joys or our whatevers. In other words, to Love.

And Jazz? As a fan of improvisational jazz, I am in awe of its similarities with the Focusing Process. There are real, live events constantly evolving in the body. The body has messages, something to say and feel, a life to live, all sorts of “felt senses” beyond any words we could ever cognitively elect to say — to be brought forward into the world. And the body will improvise over and over, year after year, decade after decade playing different cells, neurological pathways, organs and so much *else* — And in the process, a more subjective consciousness like new chords or variations on a theme we call “my body” or “my life” or “my issue.”

It is my hope, as the new leadership of the Focusing Institute moves and grooves into place, that it leads Focusers into the future with evolving democratic spirit providing a beacon of Peace amidst a storm of change, with Loving decisions and actions played out from diverse Jazzy ways and in doing so helping us all nudge, synchronize, syncopate towards more peace with our selves, others, and towards all the elements of our earth, sooner than later.

Acknowledgments: Heartfelt thanks/gratitude to my insightful guest editor, Lisa R. Tucci, who graciously donated her time in helping me with this article.

Dr. Lyly Rojas, University professor, feels fortunate to be a Peacemaker and professor of The Culture of Peace as well as consultant to multinationals in Corporate Social Responsibility. Among other articles, she has written about Focusing in War Zones while working for the UN. She was present when the city of Vienna honoured Gene's contributions to the world and gave him its keys to the City, which Gene accepted with great humility. When she is not grooving at a jazz concert, you can find her doing improvisational comedy with professional and amateur groups. She can be reached at: choosingpeace@hotmail.com

KEEPER OF THE FLAME: Healing Inter-Generational Trauma Using Focusing-Oriented Therapy

Beilah Ross, LICSW

“And our ancestors are always close at hand.” — Shirley Turcotte

INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to experience the traumatic symptoms, feelings and beliefs of others, even when the trauma was not experienced directly? Hundreds of publications on the subject of inter-generational trauma transmission argue that the answer is yes (Kellerman, 2001). Vicarious traumatization can be defined as the experience of having disturbing and/or debilitating cognitions and emotions that closely resemble the traumatic symptoms of a close relative or friend. The idea was first conceptualized in the 1960's, in response to research findings regarding the psychological impact of the Holocaust on Jewish survivors and their families (Schiffer). The body of research has since expanded to include many other forms of psychological trauma, such as persons with close emotional ties to survivors of the Indian Residential School System in Canada, Japanese Internment camps, war, and all forms of domestic and familial abuse (Frazier, et al, 2009, as cited in Schiffer).

How is trauma transmitted and absorbed by someone who has not experienced it firsthand? One explanation, among many, comes from the human brain's hard-wiring. Physiological structures such as the mirror neuron system facilitate attachment and empathy, (Goleman, 2006, as cited in Schiffer), providing us with the means to attach to others who then may be able to nurture and sustain us. Our predisposition to feeling other people's feelings also means that we can absorb and carry others' traumas as a natural part of the attachment process.

Shirley Turcotte describes the phenomenon of vicarious traumatization as evidence of “the sensitivity and compassion of the human spirit...one of the most important ways in which people help carry each other through the world.” (Schiffer, p.10). Those who are willing to co-carry the burden and implicit wisdom of trauma, however, can take on unresolved wounds that can be passed down through the generations (Personal notes from Turcotte, 2012).

In this paper I hope to demonstrate, through sharing my own journey as the keeper of my grandmother's Holocaust story, how Focusing-Oriented Therapy (FOT) can be used as a modality to treat inter-generational trauma. FOT can be a useful tool to help unburden us from what we have carried unconsciously for our ancestors, and perhaps help end the cycle of inter-generational traumatization.

“INTERACTION FIRST” AND INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

In *A Process Model* (Gendlin, 1997), Eugene Gendlin proposes the concept of “interaction first”: that is, we are interactive processes that are constantly changing as a result of interacting with others and our environment. As “interactions,” rather than “individuals,” we are highly influenced by those we interact with and how we interact.

In their paper, “Aboriginal Focusing Oriented Therapy”, Shirley Turcotte and her son, Jeffrey Schiffer, connect to Gendlin’s philosophical orientation by citing the long-held relational ontology of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. People are “not conceived as separate from the world around them, but embedded in and constituted from relationships within the world, people, language, landscape, and so on” (p. 50). From this point of view, vicarious traumatization is expanded upon to include inter-generational trauma, which is defined as “a collection of traumatic experiences that inform our minds, our bodies, our emotions and our spirits” (p. 51). Aboriginal Focusing Oriented Therapy (AFOT) has been particularly effective in addressing the complex inter-generational trauma related to “the Indian Residential School System, Aboriginal child welfare, and the aftermath of the legacy of colonization in Canada more broadly” (p. 48).

I was first introduced to AFOT in December of 2012, when I attended an introductory workshop on Focusing-Oriented Therapy and Complex Trauma. I have been struck by how its tenets have intersected with and validated my own experiences of inter-generational trauma using Focusing-Oriented Therapy. The writings of Turcotte and Schiffer regarding Complex Trauma have moved and inspired me to continue unpacking the inter-generational baggage I have carried for my ancestors.

MY GRANDMOTHER’S STORY

I am the granddaughter of Sarah Chinsky, a Polish Jewish immigrant who escaped from Poland to come to Canada in 1933. She was brought to Montreal through the efforts of her Uncle Mayer, her mother’s brother. A worldly, educated and generous man, he had anticipated the growing negative sentiment towards Jews in Eastern Europe and left Poland for New York in the late 1920’s. He brought with him his parents and siblings, leaving behind his sister Beilah, my grandmother’s mother. At the time, it seemed too great a risk to Beilah and her husband Shimon to leave with their children for North America where their ability to practice their religion seemed uncertain. As time wore on, however, it became apparent that their shtetl of Trestiner in Eastern Poland was not safe, and my great-grandparents began to organize ways to get their children out of Poland. Beilah asked her brother Mayer to help her oldest daughter, Sarah, and he obliged by paying a woman in Montreal to pose as a fictive aunt, who then received her at the Canadian border. Once in Montreal, my grandmother found a room to rent and worked in a garment factory, making ten dresses a day by hand and barely a living.

Around 1935, she received word that her father Shimon, a merchant, had been killed. He had been out peddling his wares in Bialystok, when his wagon had gotten stuck on the railroad tracks. He was struck and killed by a train while trying to get the wagon clear. My

grandmother, however, never really believed this story. She suspected that anti-Semitic gentile Poles had somehow orchestrated his death. At this time in Poland's history, her suspicion is entirely possible, but may also have been informed by the fear and distrust that she felt growing up in Poland. After my great-grandfather Shimon died, my grandmother Sarah's brother Avram, who had been studying Torah in a yeshiva outside of Poland, came back to the family shtetl of Trestiner to be with his mother and sisters. Not long after he returned, Leah and Zeva, two of his five sisters, escaped Poland through fictive marriages arranged to men living in Israel, in 1937 and 1938 respectively.

Safely in Canada, my grandmother Sarah, the oldest child, felt a responsibility to get her remaining family members out of Poland. She married my grandfather, Moishe Ross, a chicken salesman who made a decent living, hoping he would be able to help get Beilah, Avram, and her youngest sisters, Razeleh and Dvora, out of Poland. My grandfather Moishe tried his best to help, saving his money to pay their passage to Canada, but by the time he had enough to send them, the war had broken out, and the borders had closed, and the money he'd saved never got to them.

As Poland succumbed to Nazi Germany, my great-grandmother Beilah paid a Polish family to hide herself and her children for several years. But when she ran out of money, they were forced out into the street. Then, three days before the war ended, they were killed by marauding Poles intent on shooting any Jews they found.

TRAUMATIC LOSS AND ITS EFFECT ON MY GRANDMOTHER

I was 17 years old when my grandmother Sarah entrusted me with her story. We had a close relationship, and she was nurturing and loving with me in a way she wasn't able to be with her own children. At the time, it felt like an incredible honor and privilege to receive her confidence in such an intimate way. Never before had she spoken to anyone about the tragic deaths of her family, not even to her children — that is, my two aunts, uncle and father. Whenever her children had broached the subject with her in the past, she had shot them a pained or angry look, and they, respectfully, had backed off in response. They saw her as a “Pandora's Box”, trying to keep a world of pain stuffed inside an already fragile heart. Sarah's children were all relieved when she opened up to me about her family, hoping that it would give her some relief from the suffering she had held inside for so many years.

Sarah's children remember her as always being unhappy and overwhelmed by her emotions, occupying herself with household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and sewing, but never enjoying anything she was doing. Even though my grandmother was well provided for, with a loving husband who supported her through tears and depression, and four wonderful children who only wanted to please her, she could not take in these beautiful blessings. Her trauma kept her in a trance of unworthiness, locked in a world of the past.

Growing up with my grandmother, I too noticed how she'd never allow herself any pleasure. When she told me about her family's fate, she trembled and shook as she conveyed her deep suffering that she was unable to save her family of origin. She admitted her belief that because they had died, she did not deserve to be happy, for to be happy would

be to dishonor the traumatic deaths of her family members. My grandmother's confession answered questions I had always had about her: how she didn't allow herself to laugh or enjoy the moment during joyous and rowdy family occasions.

Perhaps I had been chosen for the role as keeper of our family's ancestral flame because I was three generations removed from the Holocaust and therefore the emotional charge when sharing with me — as opposed to sharing with her own children — was a lot less intense. My experience is consistent with numerous studies and interviews with Holocaust families conducted by Dan Bar-On, an Israeli psychology researcher and professor. In his book *Fear and Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust*, he shares his findings that it is often members of the third generation who are entrusted with the stories of the ancestors and preservation of the family legacy (1995). They hold the 'memorial candle' for those who were lost, and tend to the flame of memory.

JOURNEY TO ANCESTRAL LANDS

My grandmother's story touched me deeply, so much so that I wanted to connect more directly with the lands of my ancestors, which included Poland, Byelorussia and Latvia. I set out on a yearlong journey through Eastern Europe, visiting one concentration camp memorial after another as I moved across borders. As part of this trip, I volunteered with the organization Service Civil International. Staying in the former SS barracks at Buchenwald and its outposts with other German, Russian and American volunteers, we excavated the site of the former prisoners' "hospital" and worked in the memorial's archives, gathering stories of the atrocities committed by the Nazis to minorities.

As I left Germany for Poland, it didn't escape me that I was riding on the same tracks that my grandmother Sarah had ridden out of Poland; the same tracks that had taken too many to untimely and brutal deaths in extermination camps. The story of my grandmother's family came to life most powerfully at Auschwitz. There I stood, dumbfounded, amid the exhibits of the prisoners' personal items — the toothbrushes, canisters of cold cream, eye glasses, crutches — reading their stories and looking at their photographs. Heartbroken, I moved on to an exhibit detailing the efforts people made to survive, including those who went into hiding. I thought immediately of my great-grandmother Beilah and her children, hiding for four years, holding out hope for so long, only to have their lives snuffed out senselessly.

Emotions hit me hard, and I felt like I might collapse. I hastily left the building. I sat out on the steps of the memorial and began to sob uncontrollably, until I felt a presence behind me. When I turned around to see no one there, I suddenly was grasped by the conviction of the presence of my great-grandmother Beilah, with me in that moment. It was as if she sensed the pain I was feeling and had come to comfort me. I felt love, awe, gratitude, and the sense of a circle of connection that was closing. It was then that I made the decision to take my great-grandmother Beilah's name as my own, leaving behind my given name, Bethany. In that moment, Beilah and I established an enduring connection, which, in turn, brought me closer to my grandmother Sarah. It seemed that this act of journeying back to our ancestral lands was the evidence my grandmother Sarah needed to feel that I had truly heard

and had empathized with her experience. My grandmother could rest assured, now that I had taken her mother's name, that the story of her mother's resilience and bravery would not be forgotten, for it would be shared whenever I was asked about my name's origin. What I could not anticipate, in weaving this web of love and connection to my ancestors, was that I was also making myself vulnerable to entanglements with my grandmother Sarah's thoughts and feelings. This I discovered later, during Focusing-Oriented Therapy, as I unraveled reasons behind my feelings of unworthiness and their manifestations in my work and personal life.

MY GRANDMOTHER'S STORY, ALIVE IN ME

As a therapist in private practice, I found myself taking on an unnecessary amount of responsibility for my clients and their problems. I worked long hours, yet it seemed that no matter how hard I worked, how drained and exhausted I was, there was the sense that I wasn't doing enough. I felt burnt out, depressed, and unworthy of the rest that would restore me to balance. I started to examine the etiology of these cognitions and emotions in my own FOT sessions. In exploring the felt sense of my feelings around work, I discovered I had absorbed my grandmother's survivor guilt that she was not able to save her immediate family during the Second World War. In my desire to ease her pain, I had unwittingly taken on my grandmother's emotional burdens. My love and empathy for her, it seemed, had resulted in my identification with and unconscious absorption of her sadness, worthlessness, and devastation, as well as her belief that she was not entitled to happiness in life. What I found in my FOT sessions was that the felt sense of my ancestors was very much alive within me. Turcotte and Schiffer speak to this in their article "Aboriginal Focusing-Oriented Therapy", where they define the felt sense as "a bodily experience of interconnected emotion, energy and sensations that are an expression of knowledge of collective experiences through time." (p.51).

MY HEALING JOURNEY WITH FOCUSING-ORIENTED THERAPY

Of these many sessions I had with my Focusing-Oriented therapist and my longtime Focusing partner, I will share four that served as important moments on my healing journey. I will switch my language to the present tense, which best conveys, in my opinion, the experiential quality of FOT.

Session One:

The dialogue with my ancestors begins with the classic Focusing question: "What's between me and feeling fine?" In response, an all-pervasive sense of unworthiness descends upon me: a sense of not being entitled to happiness, leisure and pleasure in my life. When I ask where this felt sense comes from, I receive images of my great-grandmother Beilah, her son Avram, and her daughters Dvorah and Razeleh. I immediately want to turn away, finding myself filled with shame and fearing their reproach because I could not save them. I am surprised at my reaction. My therapist suggests that I imagine myself at a comfortable distance from them and then see what comes. When I feel able, I turn towards them and see

my great-grandmother and her children look at me with accusing eyes as if to say, “How could you have left us to die?...Why didn’t you help us?”

The feeling of shame comes again; I have not lived a life worthy of their sacrifice. This shame turns into a driving pulse in my body. So *this* is the feeling behind my workaholism! In this moment I see how my perceptions have been colored by the guilt and feelings of helplessness I have absorbed from my grandmother. This feeling of always having to strive and help others in order to have a right to exist are my grandmother’s, not my own.

Needing a sense of separateness, I connect down into my body. I ask myself, “Is there something that I need to say to my ancestors to heal my relationship with them?” An answer comes, and I decide to address my great-grandmother Beilah, because of our pre-existing relationship. I express my broken-heartedness about what she and her children have suffered. I tell her how much she has inspired me and acknowledge her resilience and strength to endure in hiding for so many years under such challenging circumstances. Beilah responds with gratitude, moved by the depth of what I feel for her family. She goes on to say, however, that my efforts to restrict my experience of happiness have no impact on the suffering they went through. To see me suffer only brings her back to her own traumatic memories. It will give more meaning to her death, and the deaths of her children, if I live with more joy.

After that session, I feel a sense of love and harmony again with my great-grandmother, as if the weight of the tragic past is no longer interfering with our relationship. As Shirley Turcotte so aptly puts it: “Just because someone is no longer with us does not mean the relationship can’t be improved or made better” (2008, p.13).

Session Two:

To honor my great-grandmother’s wishes for me to live a happier, more playful life, I dedicate my next FOT session to investigate whatever is in the way of that. What comes in response is a heavy sadness and demoralization that I have not been able to bring my grandmother Sarah the happiness I so deeply want her to have. As if to punctuate my failure to uplift her emotionally, an image comes of my Grandma Sarah sitting in her subterranean parlor watching soap operas, feeling useless and despondent. I want to comfort her and connect with her, but she is like a zombie in front of the TV — unreachable. Whatever I do to engage her, I cannot diminish her sadness. As I keep her and this feeling company, the words come: “Perhaps it is *the Sarah in me* who feels useless.” I ask myself: “Is there something in me that feels like it does not belong to me? Something that I might have absorbed from my family, the history of my people?”

Then comes the fear of falling into the same pit of darkness in which Sarah lived her life. It seems I no longer feel I have a distinct sense of self, but rather an identity that is mixed up with those of my ancestors, in a dense and sticky dough of some kind. I ask, “What’s needed for Sarah to recover from her trauma?” An image comes of my great-grandmother Beilah with her hands on Sarah’s shoulders. Beilah looks at me and says: “We’re still working on her. She took everything so hard and blamed herself. What we went through was awful, but I want the suffering to stop. I don’t want you to hold yourself responsible like she

did. You have a chance to break free. It's her stuff; it doesn't belong to you. Enjoy your life, and trust that by doing that, it will be healing for her."

I tell my great-grandmother Beilah that I can't leave my grandmother Sarah like this — in her current state. At this point, it seems the therapist in me takes over. The thought comes that Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) might help my grandmother: that if Beilah and I provide bilateral stimulation, we may be able to bring my grandmother back to life. I ask Beilah if she'd be willing to be part of a healing team with me, and she agrees. We administer EMDR by blowing in an alternating fashion into each of my grandmother's ears. After we do a set of bilateral stimulation, my grandmother Sarah blinks open her eyes and asks: "Was I sleeping long?" I respond by saying, "Yes Grandma, you've been sleeping a long time. But by sleeping through the bad moments, you slept through the good moments too. Now you have an opportunity to take in the good, and I want you to try to allow yourself to, if you can. Remember that time when all your kids and grandkids came over for Passover? You had cooked all this delicious food, yet you were too busy in the kitchen, cleaning up while we were eating, to take in how much everyone was enjoying each other and all the amazing dishes you had made. Try if you can to return to that time; look around you and see if you can allow yourself to take in your blessings. You have two sons who are doctors and two daughters who are mental health professionals. Your kids and grandkids are successful and happy. No one is living in fear of persecution. We love you so much and want more than anything for you to be happy. Can you please try to take that in, Grandma?"

She pauses, then sadly and slowly shakes her head no. "I know I should be feeling joy, but I can't feel it because this sadness about losing my family is too big. There's no room for any other feelings inside of me." Beilah and I do another set of EMDR, after which I morph into Sarah, and embody her, sitting at the table. My great-grandmother Beilah looks to Sarah and says: "It's not your fault. You did the best you could to try and help us, and for that we are grateful. There was nothing more you could have done."

Beilah's message doesn't penetrate. I feel a weariness and deep sadness, as I think about how war and genocide have affected so many generations of humanity. Just then, the images of our Passover seder turn from color to black and white in my mind's eye. A foul odor overcomes the room. It's like a smog has rolled in and is hovering over my grandmother's table. The thought comes: "It's when you sit down and stop, that's when the depression sets in and the smog that smells of murder. And then it feels as if you can never weep enough." Sarah's grief has merged with mine to the point that it feels as if my own mother, father, sisters and brother have been killed. An unbearable ache comes in my heart and a tightening comes in my throat; it's like being strangled. I realize then that I can no longer run from this feeling if I want to be free and happy. For so many years, I've been too terrified to really rest and let go of control, fearing that if I do, everything in my life will fall apart.

But I have learned in my years of Focusing that there is no feeling that can destroy me if I just give it space and accept it as it is. I remember that if I can employ the Focusing attitude and hold that felt sense with friendliness, receptivity and compassion, it will soon shift and transform into something much less scary and intimidating. With patience and

kindness, I keep the strangled feeling company until my throat releases and feels more free and open. I remember Gendlin's seminal premise that every human experience has an inherent forward movement within it (Gendlin, 1982). I am comforted, and have faith that Focusing will carry me forward to what is to come.

Session Three:

I come in to this FOT session overwhelmed with what I perceive as the demands of clients in my private practice. I ask myself, "What steps can I take towards living a life of joy and balance, rather than seeing my clients' problems as my own and always feeling that it's my job to solve them?" The thought comes that I need to create boundaries around myself: a safe place or refuge where I can be free of the sorrows and burdens of others, where I can be alone to recuperate and regroup from the demands of life. This sanctuary is a one-room cedar cabin on an island in the middle of a lake. I see myself seated in an overstuffed chair by the fireplace, sipping tea and watching the loons and herons out the window. As the sun beams in through a skylight, I experience the sun as the warmth of Beilah and Sarah's love streaming into my heart. I see them looking down at me with their arms around each other, saying with relief and contentment, "She's happy! She's happy." They seem fulfilled to see me at peace; it is like a miracle to them. Now that they know I am cared for, they can let go. Now that I know they have reconnected and are taking care of each other, I can stop taking care of them, and focus on myself without feeling selfish. I no longer feel crowded by my ancestors' emotions, and experience their presence as a source of inspiration and strength.

Session Four:

In my last FOT session, I think about what to do with the remaining and unwanted emotions I have absorbed from my ancestors. I remember Shirley Turcotte's suggestion that we find a way to set them down in a ritualistic manner.

I don't want to return this pain to Sarah and Beilah because I want to fulfill Beilah's wish for the suffering to end. I don't want to give it to Earth because She is carrying too much already. So I decide to give it to Space. I imagine throwing these residual burdens up in the air where they transform into glimmering stardust, moving out and dispersing into the infinite expanse of Space. A great felt shift comes in my body, and I feel a lightness inside as never before. Moving forward, I know that I need never feel alone with my pain again, that my ancestors are living life with me as a shared experience. I see that the individual healing I do on myself can ultimately influence and be healing for others. As Turcotte states: "If Time is all here right now, the work I do will benefit my ancestors. Healing the present I heal the past. (Personal notes from Turcotte, 2012.)"

CONCLUSION

The Focusing attitude creates a sacred space in which inter-generational wounds can be honored and attended to. Within this safety, I have communicated in a kind and compassionate way with my ancestors. My grandmother and my great-grandmother have reconciled with each other and I with them. I have experienced a felt shift in how I relate to and carry them, and the strong sense that this profound change will be of benefit to their spirits. FOT has helped me identify and honor my unconscious drives towards self-sacrifice and productivity and given me an awareness of how my grandmother's beliefs of unworthiness have contributed to my workaholicism in my career as a therapist. Finally, it has enabled me to find concrete and creative ways to clear space between my emotions and the emotions of my ancestors.

As I close this chapter in my healing journey, I am reminded of an image that came early on in my Focusing on this subject: an orange tree rooted in Israel's soil. The roots of my family tree — that is, the resilience and strength of my ancestors — create the stability needed for our trunk to grow tall. We are all together now in safety as a family, allowed to be who we are as individuals. As part of this tree, I have the right to forge the breadth and direction of my own branch. I have the right to be here and take care of myself, to take my legacy and be creative with it, and turn it into something new. And, in my practice as a Focusing-Oriented therapist, I can draw on my experiences with inter-generational healing and FOT to help others on their journey to wholeness.

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HELPING CHILDREN (AND ADULTS) TO FIND THEIR INNER HOME

Tine Swyngedouw

The theme of the 25th International Focusing Conference in 2013 in Switzerland was “Coming home”. For me this expression points to our inner home, coming home to ourselves, and welcoming and including all our inner guests into our inner home.

This paper explores how we can help children to find their inner home by answering three questions:

1. How do we look at children? What is our basic attitude towards them?
2. If I want to help them to find their inner home through Focusing, what exactly is it that I want to teach children?
3. What do we need for ourselves before and during this experience of teaching Focusing to children?

I found my answers to these questions by reflecting on my work as an experiential psychotherapist, asking myself how I integrate Focusing in my work and also by exploring what is so attractive and true for me in doing some Focusing exercises I really like, for example, the elevator rides of Lucy Bowers (2001, 2002) and the inner weather of Shoji Tsuchie (2003).

The answers to these questions give me a framework for looking at what exercises feel right to do with children. I offer here some examples of good practice based on this framework.

1. How do we look at children? What is our basic attitude towards them?

This is an important question because children notice the basic attitude adults hold towards them. We can’t hide our basic attitude from them because they *hear* it in the language we use when we talk to them, and they *feel* it in the kind of relationship we develop with them.

It is very important that our attitude towards children reflects a deep respect for them. We do not present ourselves as the adults who know everything and to whom they should listen. Instead we are standing next to each other, equal in the sense that we are both experts on our own inner worlds. We want to take the child seriously.

Having a respectful attitude will make a real difference to how we teach a child Focusing and how we talk and listen to them. As Marta Stapert (2000) observed in her workshop on “How to be with children in their Focusing”:

Through language our basic attitude is expressed. We need to develop new sentences for talking to children. A lot of sentences now and in the past reflect an attitude of suppressing children, not taking them seriously, not giving space to a child. We need to make new sentences that reflect respect and a positive attitude towards children. And we need to ask open questions, offering space without pressure, nothing has to be said, nothing has to happen.

For me, this basic attitude also implies that we go where the child and his/her process goes, and that we respectfully follow wherever the process takes them. It is important to maintain a Focusing attitude, to be with them with open-ended questions, allowing them to find their own answers within themselves. We want to open the door for children to find, develop and trust their inner knowing so that they will become independent human beings, standing firmly in themselves on their own two feet. Analia Zaccai (2009) says:

Children are knowers; they have a natural knowing capacity. We must not fill them with what it should be and with our knowledge and contents. Filling them is omitting their authentic self. Focusing is making time for their inner knowing. We need to make space for their inner knowing. An important question for children is: “What is it like for you? What is it like inside you?” It is important to let them talk from there. We do not want to tell them what to do and how to do it until they are 11 years and then suddenly when they turn 12 years old expect them to be able to choose for themselves.

How we teach Focusing follows and honors the inner knowing process of the child. All we need to teach them is how to *get* to their inner knowing and how to *be* there so the process can unfold.

Basic respect towards children implies that we do not guide them toward any specific content — or put a label on their inner experience. As we sit with a child or a group of children, we really cannot presume to know what is on their minds or what they are ‘holding’ in their bodies. We cannot even begin to imagine what might have happened to them prior to coming to school that day. And neither can we imagine what inner effects these previous experiences have had on them as they sit before us. So let’s not instruct them to go to a certain content. Let’s not assume that we as adults know what they need to work on now. Let’s respect children as individuals and live what we preach: trusting both their and our inner process.

For example, if we are invited to do some Focusing with children whose classmate has suddenly died, we shouldn’t assume that every child’s inner experience at that moment will primarily center on the pain of the loss of their classmate. Maybe one girl, when asked to check inside, might find an inner excitement about an upcoming dance performance while another child might be experiencing anxiety about missing out on his birthday party. Let’s not assume that we know and they don’t.

For me there is no fixed program or a fixed way to teach a child Focusing. My approach develops in and out of the interaction between me and the children, meaning that I have to let

go of knowing in advance which exercise I will do and when and how I will do it. Teaching in this way requires flexibility to follow wherever the process takes us. Of course, such an adventure is only possible when there is a real trust in the Focusing process, that whatever will happen is OK, a radical acceptance of whatever Focusing brings forward.

2. If I want to help them to find their *inner home* through Focusing, what exactly is it that I want to teach children?

My aim is not to teach children the 6 steps of Focusing as you might do in a workshop for adults. But what can I teach them instead?

For me the most important thing to teach children is the process of the *inner act* (finding the way to go inside and *be there* with whatever comes up) and the *inner attitude* (being there with friendly, open and welcoming attention for whatever is there).

The handle for me for this process is PEAS.

- First of all the process is about *Pausing*. Stopping my usual way of living and doing. Simply taking a break from all my usual stuff. Stopping my habitual reactions.
- And making a welcoming space for *Experiencing*. Going into my body, dropping down to the experiential level, and inviting whatever needs my attention now or sensing the whole thing about a situation and waiting, giving *it* time to develop.
- And when something is there, *Acknowledging it*. Being there for *it*, starting a relationship with *it* by saying *hello*, and making sure *it* knows that I have noticed *it* and allowing *it* to be there for as long as *it* needs to be, and where and how *it* needs to be there.
- And then *Symbolizing it*, building and developing our relationship and getting to know *it* better, listening to *its* story, from *its* point of view, being in a welcoming relationship with *it*, respecting *it*, making space for whatever *it* needs to tell me for now and for what *it* is not wanting and wanting for me.

These four letters help me not only as a Focusing trainer and as an experiential psychotherapist but also as a teacher of trainers and psychotherapists. PEAS outlines the four most basic principles that people new to Focusing need to learn. PEAS is also a handle for looking at new Focusing exercises to evaluate whether or not they fit for me, and whether or not I want to add them to the basket of possible Focusing exercises I might want to do with people.

My inspiration for PEAS comes from working together with my colleagues who are experiential psychotherapists in Belgium, Frans Depestele, Ellen Gunst, Chris Van de Veire and Joke Van Hoeck. We collaborate on how to integrate Focusing in therapy. PEAS is also based on Ann Weiser Cornell's Inner Relationship Focusing (1996, 2005). We agree that the main task is building a nurturing inner relationship between "I" and "something in me". "I" is turning towards "something in me", offering it Self-in-Presence and then, within this allowing environment, "something in me" can tell its story and unfold in its life forward direction.

This radical acceptance of everything opens the door to welcoming all our inner guests and frees us from dividing our inner world into good parts and bad parts. Whatever is there carries a knowing of what is implied and of its life forward direction. That is why I am very careful not to instruct or guide children towards some content or some kind of felt sense or labeling a felt sense as pleasant, nice, hard or difficult. Developing this inner relationship of including and listening to all their inner parts empowers children's inner voice, thus helping them to become independent adults.

PEAS is not my only handle for teaching Focusing. Another one I learned from Lucy Bowers (during her workshop in Pforzheim in 2010). She says that all children need to know are two verbs: *noticing* and *nurturing* because that is the essence of Focusing. If they can *notice* and *nurture* something, then forward movement can come.

And during Analia Zaccai's workshop in Flanders in 2009 I found yet another handle. It is the principle of inclusion. She teaches children this principle of inclusion by living it in the class.

We are unique and everybody is different and everything is worth valuing inside and outside. Focusing is inclusive attention and value to what is being felt (good, pain, our well being, our creativeness, likes and dislikes, uncertainty, discomfort....). (p.9)

She starts by teaching children body-awareness. And from there the children start to ask questions. She finds that they want to Focus more frequently, often asking what it is that they are doing and if there is more to know. Of course, the children are free to choose whether or not they want to go inside. If they don't want to do that, they do something else with another group in the class.

This process of contacting their inner knowing is strengthened by carefully following what the children are saying and responding with open questions. One very important question is, "What is it like for you — *inside* you — now?" Nothing is pushed on them, and the children know that everything they bring up is OK.

Teachers should offer a lot of possible follow ups and invite the children to respect their choices. They are free to choose whether or not they want to symbolize it. If they want to symbolize, they are offered different possibilities and are invited to choose what fits for them now: drawing, painting, making a mandala, working with clay, writing, reflecting upon drawings or words, exchanging with a friend, or with the teacher, or in a small group. And again, they know that they don't have to do any of these activities. Whatever the next step that the child feels inside is OK to do next.

This radical attitude of "everything is OK" makes it easy for the children to really understand that it is OK to be yourself.

3. What do we need for ourselves before and during this experience of teaching Focusing to children?

It is absolutely necessary that you are an experienced Focuser yourself before you start teaching Focusing to children. You need to have experienced in your body what can happen during Focusing, and to have built a basic trust in the process of Focusing. When you really know in your bones that Focusing works and how it works, this inner knowledge will be felt when you meet the children and want to teach them Focusing. You will not feed their brains with facts, but you will be a living example of what you teach: they see you doing what you're saying. Or as Analia Zaccai (2009) would put it: "Be a walking Focusing attitude!" (p. 10)

Mary Jennings, Phil Kelly, Derek McDonnell and Kay McKinney also feel that people need a good grounding in Focusing before they start Focusing with children. That's why the first three months of their training program for foster parents in Ireland are devoted entirely to teaching Focusing to the foster parents. Once the foster parents learn to trust their own unfolding process, then the subject of Focusing with children starts.

Marianne Thompson (1992) writes:

As parents or adults working with children there are some simple basics we need to learn before we can teach them to focus. First, we need to have a body experience of what Focusing feels like from the inside, and a body-feel for movement and felt shifts. Second, there needs to be a sense for not trying to fix or control the children. And third, it's very important to have a sense for a caring feeling presence toward whatever hurts or frightens us before we can teach this to the kids. This step is really the most important for them, because just like most of us they have been trained to run from hurting places. (p.3)

Marianne Thompson's advice points to a second reason why it is important to know Focusing for yourself before you start doing Focusing with children: you need to know your own inner world and be able to take care of your own inner hurt places. In her workshop "It should not hurt to be a child" Lucy Bowers (2010) said: "When you interact with children, the child in you is in contact with that too, it is part of the interaction. The hurt places in you can either help or hinder this contact. Your inner child needs to be nurtured." She advised that when you notice something interfering with your contact with a child, you can acknowledge that interference as something in your own inner world and promise to give it attention later.

Zack Boukydis (2012) in his latest book, *Collaborative Consultation with Parents and Infants in the Perinatal Period*, also writes: "Infants call forth parents' own inner infant or inner child memories." (p.195) Later, he further explains that "work in focusing oriented parent-infant consultation and therapy includes times for 'dyadic' sessions and individual sessions with parents. During individual sessions some therapists may facilitate parents to do inner child/inner infant work." (2014, p. 170)

The third reason that you need to be an experienced Focuser yourself before you start working with children is that you need to know how to stay connected to your own felt sense while doing something else, in this case teaching Focusing to children, because being with your own felt sense while teaching Focusing to children is a complex process. So it is important to practice being with your own felt sense in other situations where you are teaching something to others — or where other people are involved in an emotional process.

This tuning in towards your own felt sense will be important during the teaching process because your felt sense will give you a feel of what tempo is right, when to go to a next step, or when to round off. Your felt sense will also give you a feel of when a Focusing moment might be good in a specific group. And it is exactly the place from where you listen and the place from where you reply. Lucy Bowers (2007) sums it up:

The key to using Focusing effectively with children is for the caregivers, whether parents, grandparents or teachers, to know, understand and practice Focusing in their own lives. Intimate knowledge of the Felt Sense and how it operates in the body, and of the “Focusing Attitude” and its importance in providing a gentle, compassionate presence, are all necessary for movement in the process. (p.85)

When you teach Focusing to children, it is also important that you are authentic, real, and not in some kind of role. Analia Zaccai (2009) also thinks that when you stay connected to your own felt sense, what you say comes from what you truly feel and think. Being authentically yourself and sharing that when it fits is really appreciated by children and teenagers who are more used to seeing adults as role models. Being genuine conveys the essential concept that “It is OK to be myself.” (p.3)

And last, but not least, it is important to have fun together when you teach Focusing to children. A sense of fun reinforces that Focusing is not just another school activity, something they have to do and learn, something imposed on them from outside. Rather Focusing is something which is fun to do together, as Eugene Gendlin (1986) points out in his dream-work: “Love and enjoy the dream, interpreted or not...Enjoying the dream is more important than interpreting it. Therefore, don’t work so hard that it stops being pleasant and exciting...Just love the dream and expect another.” (p. 27-28) In the same way it is important that children love and enjoy this connecting to their inner world.

Marta Stapert (2000) in her workshop on “How to be with children in their Focusing” also wants us to keep it playful. She advises us to just notice what’s happening inside and you might want to draw that. But these drawings are not for interpretation. Instead, Focusing should be all about the wanting to spend time in your *inner home* and to go inside, discovering what *lives there*, and symbolizing that — and that’s it! Avoid imposing heavy, adult instructions or intellectual interpretations of the drawing. Emphasize the playfulness of being free to go inside, of saying hello to whatever is there, and of staying there with whatever comes up for a while.

4. Conclusion

Several **principles** emerge from these ideas that can help us build a **framework** that can point towards instances of good practice for Focusing with children — and with adults.

1. We need an attitude and language that reflects respect, taking children seriously, **empowering their inner knowing, following the process of the child**. The above implies not guiding them toward content, not labeling their inner experience, not holding on to a fixed program.
2. We want to teach children the **process of the inner act**, how to get inside and how to be there so that whatever is there can unfold in its life forward direction. Implied here is teaching **PEAS**, teaching a nurturing **inner relationship** with all their inner parts, teaching **noticing and nurturing**, and teaching **inclusion** (a radical acceptance of everything).
3. We need to be **experienced Focusers** ourselves because we need to know in our bones that Focusing works and how it works. We need to really **trust the process**. Secondly we need to know **our own inner world** in order to take care of our own inner hurts and frightened places. And thirdly, we need to be able to be connected to **our own felt sense** while being with the children. We need to be **authentic** and real and speak from our felt sense, and not from a role. We want to **have fun** together.

There are many instances of good practice that demonstrate the value of this framework. Let me share some of my favorites with you.

- Reading books that tell something about Focusing, the Focusing attitude, felt sensing, or having a nurturing relationship with your inner parts. For example: *There's no such thing as a dragon* (Kent, 1975), *The little bird who found herself* (McMahon, 2008).
- Focusing exercises: Elevator rides (Bowers, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2008), Inner weather (Tsuchie, 2003), KOL-BE (Perlstein, 2013, Coenen, 2011), Guided imagery of a tree in full bloom (Verliefde and Stapert, 2003).

I hope that this article encourages you to reflect on your own Focusing principles and instances of good practice in your own field. All feedback is welcome.

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WHERE IS FOCUSING IN TODAY'S MIND/BODY EXPLORATIONS?

Mary Jane Wilkie

Tapping into the wisdom of our bodies is the next phase in human development. Many and varied are the approaches, and persons wishing to access somatic information or integrate mind and body have an array of choices that might perplex the conscientious seeker. A large population acknowledges the relationship between body condition and emotions, and I suspect many people would like to act, but are not sure where to turn.

MYRIAD OPTIONS

A search at amazon.com for books on mind-body therapy yields 100 pages (10 entries/page). Googling “mind-body workshops” produces myriad options. Methods for heightening our knowledge and capacity include reading books, taking courses and workshops, and establishing relationships with psychotherapists or other practitioners. How is a body to choose?

We may want the knowledge for ourselves, or to teach others, or both. Some of the methods are Focusing, Somatic Experiencing, Mindfulness, Guided Imagery, NeuroAffective Relational Model, Journey into Healing, and others whose originators write books or offer workshops at, for example, the Open Center (New York City) or the Omega Institute (upstate New York). Each perspective makes a contribution to our understanding, but the methods that prevail will offer varied structures and practices to build upon, and concepts for achieving greater depths of understanding. Each approach attempts to provide consistent instructions to promote new learners' success.

ONE PERSON'S STORY

I learned about Focusing when a friend gave me a copy of *Focusing*. Because of my involvement with Somatic Experiencing, I was familiar with most of the concepts so I finished the book in almost in one sitting. I was intrigued and went to the Institute's website to see how I could act on my interest.

I found several Changes groups and after some exploration became a regular participant in Larry Hurst's West Side Group. The first time I attended, Larry met with me for several hours prior to start time to acquaint me with the practice. I have regularly attended his group for the last four years.

THE FOCUSING ADVANTAGE

An advantage of Focusing is that one can practice the process regularly, regardless of whether one is in therapy, or attends workshops. I equate the practice to ensemble playing

in music. Although you learn things in a private lesson with your piano teacher, you develop different abilities when you play with other musicians. And music-making is really the objective. In like manner, you benefit from therapy sessions, but the objective of mind/body exploration is usually to feel more comfortable with yourself in the company of others — and to enjoy life.

As I learned more about Focusing, I was inspired to share the process with others. The Institute's website mentioned that one could train to be a Coordinator, and I thought I might do that. I called the Institute to learn the steps and was told that they customize training for each Coordinator. This puzzled me, and I didn't know what to do next, so I just kept attending Changes meetings and started to participate in New York Metro Focusing Group events.

Two years into my Focusing practice, in 2012, I attended the Focusing Institute Summer School. Because of my interest in children, I enrolled in Rene Veugelers's track. I had read Marta Stapert's *Focusing with Children* and other child-related materials and was excited about the potential. That year I also attended Lucy Bowers's Focusing with Children conference in Toronto. Although I don't currently work with children, I found myself wishing I had known about Focusing when I was a full-time teacher. It occurred to me that I might be called to share the message with parents and teachers, although I wasn't sure how to do this.

Meanwhile, I thought it might be a good idea to take Level II, assuming that at some point the path would become clear for me to play to a larger role in disseminating Focusing to others. At FISS, I spoke to Ann Weiser Cornell about her upcoming training, and she agreed to work with me, saying, "I teach Inner Relationship Focusing." This was the first time I heard that there were different kinds of Focusing. I subsequently learned that a number of the leaders in the Focusing community (e.g., Lynn Preston, Rob Foxcroft, Robert Lee) had specific ways of teaching Focusing. Each had a following, maintained through various means (books, workshops), and they publicized their work within the Focusing community.

I learned too, that the various leaders in the Children's Focusing community had specific approaches. I even heard one leader say about another, "[that person] doesn't really *get* it." Startled, I asked, "Who decides who *gets* it?" To date I have no answer.

I still didn't know how to make a greater contribution and didn't know whether what I had learned constituted a specific level of training, or whether it would help me on the road to becoming a Coordinator. I took a one-day workshop with Janet Pfunder (Level II), but still didn't know what type of Focusing she was imparting. I decided to use Focusing merely for my own personal growth, a supplement to the astounding changes I was experiencing in sessions with my Somatic Experiencing therapist.

DIVERSITY: CURSE OR BLESSING?

It may help to compare Focusing training with other methodologies. I practice Iyengar Yoga (an exacting form delivered by teachers in more than 60 countries), and I have been certified in two music pedagogies (Orff, and Kodály). The founders of each of these practices are deceased, but their teachings are alive in the instructors. Whether I am a student

(Iyengar) or teacher (Orff, Kodály), I notice that such teachers apply their knowledge with an individual approach, yet all are true to the founder's principles.

The key is to be principle-driven rather than protocol-driven (and to see the teaching as tools rather than rules). If we were to observe many teachers practicing Iyengar, Orff, or Kodály, we would recognize that even though they are teaching a particular model, each teacher has his/her own way and personal style. To use a culinary metaphor, we could each make a dish recognizable as meat loaf, but each one's version would taste slightly different.

By establishing basic parameters and guidelines for the teaching, with the intent of conveying a "product" that is similar everywhere, there is no reason to believe that awarding a single Focusing therapist, trainer or coordinator certificate would hinder individual approaches for the principles taught. People such as I might find the way to participation at a new level.

FOCUSING IN THE POST-GENDLIN ERA

I had wondered what would happen to the Focusing community when Eugene Gendlin stepped down. The sequence of events put me in "organizational analysis" mode. For almost fifteen years now, I have generated most of my income recruiting executives for a national non-profit organization. The work has taught me a lot about organizations, their executives, and the characteristics that support longevity.

Many organizations disappear when the founder steps down, but what makes it possible for one organization to survive, and another not? I pose here some questions crucial to the life of any organization.

- *How do potential participants learn about Focusing? What attracts them to the organization?*
- *Is attendance at program events growing? What percentage of the attendees are newcomers?*
- *Are interest groups in the world-wide community growing? (e.g. Body workers? Focusing with Children? Other areas of specific interest?) What percentage of those participants is new?*
- *Is new blood coming into the ranks, and in all age groups?*
- *How do potential participants learn about the organization?*
- *What is the organization's strategic plan for spreading its vision?*
- *How is the effectiveness of its plan measured?*
- *Do its leaders have the willingness and means to correct the course, if warranted?*

I myself have no statistics, but it would be useful to have responses to these questions. It may be that new people are flocking to the Focusing community and that would be thrilling. And also helpful to know whether *Focusing* book sales are increasing, because each reader represents a potential participant.

Even though many Focusing books are promoted as self-help methods, I do not believe it is as easy, as is often implied, to learn the deeper skills of listening, finding a partner, or becoming integrated into Focusing activities. I equate the dilemma with learning how to play guitar by consulting a book or taking an on-line course. The student does learn some things, but a book cannot anticipate the myriad of human reactions to circumstances. I have watched Larry Hurst's careful work to enable participants to function effectively in Changes groups. If Focusers are to continue to learn and practice and to develop a discipline that supports their desire to become stronger at self-regulation and enjoy satisfying human interaction, the initial platform must be solid and integrate crucial components. The Institute can play an important part in facilitating that process.

The diversity of approaches has value, but I submit that for newcomers the initial understanding of what might fit could be confusing. It would seem advantageous to have a basic "starter" model in preparation for in-depth participation in one form or another.

Even though one can find a list of potential Focusing partners on the website, I wonder how efficacious this system is. I have seen Focusers exercise great care in choosing their partners, usually after a period of acquaintanceship in, for example, a Changes group. The process outlined on the website seems — at least to me — laborious and requires a newcomer to join the Institute before seeking a partner. I suspect there are many who would benefit from Focusing but haven't found the format easy or fulfilling. I hope I am wrong. Are newcomers using this system and, if so, are they staying?

GROWING THE ORGANIZATION

The successful organization is one that serves its constituents and adds value to their lives. The community's *existing* constituents are primarily therapists, teachers, counselors, and individuals drawn to the practice. *Potential* constituents are any organization that would introduce the practice in formal settings, e.g., schools, counseling centers, faith-based organizations, adult-learning centers. From my observation, it appears that most inroads have occurred through the work of *individuals*. A strong organization can accomplish even more.

The Focusing communications I routinely receive from various sources are internally focused, meaning that they dwell on the inner Focusing experience with its many manifestations, assuming that the reader is immersed in the practice. I believe that it is important to simultaneously take an *outward focus*, in order to offer a pathway for new people to become involved. We are all potential spokespeople for Focusing, and it behooves us to have a clear sense of its benefits and be able to explain Focusing in terms that non-Focusers will understand. Think of the "elevator moment." How would you describe Focusing in 30 seconds, sufficient for your listener to want more? Why should *organizations* be interested in Focusing? I suggest that the Focusing community should consider taking a more external focus, using terms and examples that non-Focusing people can easily understand, and providing easy access to start on the Focusing path. And most importantly, the audience — or market — should include organizational leaders, administrators, i.e., persons in a position to support the work of individuals trained in Focusing.

Without too much effort, I can think of some potentially useful partnerships: National Education Association, National Association for Education of the Young Child, American Montessori Society, American Holistic Medical Association, Columbia Teachers College, The Search Institute. I am sure that readers can name others. We shouldn't wait for them to find us. We could familiarize ourselves with their needs and participate in their work, in order to inform them about how Focusing could benefit their respective visions and goals. Tactics would include presentations at conferences, adult learning centers, and any community gathering of potential constituents.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION

We must be solid practitioners ourselves, i.e., practice Focusing regularly with partners and groups. Building the ranks can increase the number of those who can oversee Changes groups and those who can teach others. The work requires organizational support, and The Focusing Institute can be a crucial component in fostering and supporting the efforts of individuals and groups.

The Institute is already doing valuable work through trainings, by offering a network, and by making available Gendlin's writings, but it might be more effective if the F.I. knew the needs of various sub-communities, such as: Changes groups, the children's contingent, and local and international groups. I suspect that many more Focusers would be willing to support the work if the capabilities of Institute members were even more effectively used (a database of skills and connections is invaluable for this).

I can envision programs in schools and other community organizations. I can envision seminars for individuals to delve more deeply into the theories behind Focusing. I can envision a sub-community devoted to sharing Focusing by any number of means.

The world needs what Focusing has to offer, and now is the time to share it!

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WAYS OF GROUPING

Honoring Personal Intricacy in Group Formats

Rosa Zubizarreta

There are many ways to “group”...older ways, newer ways...Maybe what would be most helpful is for each of us to think about, “What kind of grouping would be truly helpful *here*, in this particular context? What do I want ‘group’ to mean? What function would it serve?”

We know that there are many problems with the old ways of ‘grouping’, and the kinds of ‘meetings’ they imply, and most of us have plenty of experience with what doesn’t work. For example, we know how much energy can be spent, trying to ‘decide’ on things, and having everyone agree to something, only to have people continue on afterward pretty much as before.

In some ways, this situation is analogous to the old way of attempting to ‘help’ someone: we know how much energy can be wasted on trying to ‘fix’ a person, give them advice, etc...At the same time, as Focusers, we know that there are other ways: we know how much better it can be to listen to a person and to help create a supportive context where he or she might allow their own ‘next steps’ to come...How, then, might our Focusing experiences with individuals apply in a context where several people have come together? How can we be with others in a human grouping in a way that offers enough space for each of us to remain connected with our own felt-sensing?

I believe it is important for each of us to ask ourselves this question and to find our own answers. And, I want to offer here several different formats that I have found helpful in my own experience...both for their own sake, and also for serving as a catalyst for your own explorations. Below are four different ‘ways of grouping’ that I experience as compatible with a Focusing sensibility. This list is not meant to be a complete one, only an initial offering to stimulate further thinking and conversation.

GROUPING AROUND ‘SOMETHING FUZZY IN THE MIDDLE’: Coming together around shared interests without “merging”

If we are working with the old models of grouping, one of the surest recipes for disaster is to bring together a group of people around an unclear vision. Each person will have his or her own idea of what ‘the group’ should be about, and much time can be lost wrangling over the ambiguity...

However, from a Focusing perspective, we can turn this ‘recipe for disaster’ on its head quite easily. It is perfectly possible to gather together productively around something that is fuzzy...IF our purpose is simply to give each person the listening support they need in order to come up with **his or her own** sense of ‘what is in the middle.’ I learned this

from Robert Lee, when my husband Bruce Nayowith and I assisted him in preparing for the Focusing International in Costa Rica. (For a case study of our work there, see Raelin, 2010, pp 150-154.)

Here is an example: Suppose I am interested in “Focusing and Bicycles.” I am not really sure what I mean by “Focusing and Bicycles”.... I just know that I love to Focus, and I love to bicycle, and I think it would be great to combine the two somehow. So I put out my interest and end up with a few others who are also interested in “Focusing and Bicycles”.

Now, *the most important thing here is to avoid the pitfall of assuming that we all mean the same thing* by “Focusing and Bicycles.” A somewhat more sophisticated yet equally dangerous pitfall is the assumption that once we take the time to figure out what each of us means we will somehow end up in the same general ballpark.

Our work together will be much more productive if we assume the exact opposite instead. Since I’m not sure what I mean exactly by “Focusing and Bicycles”, it’s *quite likely* that we will each end up with very different takes on the subject and very different projects that we may want to launch. This is so, **especially if** our grouping is successful at listening and supporting each person in it! If I initially assumed that we were “all going to end up in the same place”, I might be frustrated by this outcome. If, instead, I understood the purpose of this grouping as an opportunity for each of us to become clearer on what exactly each one of us wants from exploring “Focusing and Bicycles”, I will be delighted.

It might help to understand this first kind of grouping as a ‘support group’ for individuals clarifying their own projects. The basic format is to take a good chunk of our time together and divide it equally among us, so each of us has the opportunity to explore our felt-sensing and our thinking in the context of good listening support. In one sense there is no ‘leader’ to for this kind of grouping, as since each person gets equal time within the group. Nonetheless, a certain kind of leadership is still required. If the grouping is to succeed, it helps if the host, who is extending the invitation, is very clear about the particular format that is being offered and about the reason for its value. If not, given the prevalent conditioning in our culture, some participants may bring an expectation that we will *all* end up working on something ‘together’.

When we are able to gather effectively in this kind of grouping, each of us benefits from the opportunity to become clearer about our own projects. If the number of people is small enough, we can each take turns with everyone else listening. In this way, we get to know each other’s unfolding projects fairly well. This means that we may often be able to offer resources and connections to one another that may help each of us in taking our own ‘next steps forward’. It is also possible that some natural clusters might emerge: at some point, two or three people *might* end up working on something together.

However, if I *expect* that, as a result of this particular grouping, we will all end up working together on the same thing, I may be quite disappointed. There is nothing wrong with wanting to work together with others...however, with group process, it is much more likely to work well when a grouping begins with a clear and specific initial vision. If I have a clearer vision, I am ready to create a different kind of grouping.

STARTING WITH A CLEAR VISION: One Way to Do a “Selfish” Grouping

Suppose I have a clear sense of a project that I want to create, and I want to ask for help in creating it. Alternatively, here is a slightly different scenario: I have already started working on a project. Others are inspired by the work I am doing, and want to contribute. For a while now I’ve been doing it “all by myself” but am now considering that it might be possible to receive help and support with the project I am doing.

Now I want to stop and explain that I am really teasing when I call this second kind of grouping a ‘selfish grouping’ because the kinds of visions and projects that will naturally draw help and support from others tend to be ones that in some way address the well-being of the whole.

At the same time, in order to grow into being, each particular vision needs at least one person to be its holder, to dedicate him or herself to keeping it alive by staying true to it. Sometimes, when we find ourselves in that role, we may hesitate to ask others for help, feeling that if we were to do so, we might need to compromise the vision in some way. So the vision *itself* is not at all “selfish”, but we may often end up feeling that it would be “selfish” to ask for help with it since we know deep down that we need to safeguard the vision, and we don’t want to jeopardize the vision we are developing.

Here, then, is one way that we might welcome the help that our own projects need while safeguarding our role as vision-keeper.

This format consists of three rounds. In round one, the vision-keeper or project initiator goes first. He or she begins by describing the current state of the project, along with any needs for help. Those who are drawn to the vision and want to support the initiator take turns reflecting back this information and asking clarifying questions as needed. Then the project initiator takes some time to Focus on the project, with listening support from a participant.

During the second round, each of the support persons takes a short thinking/Focusing turn. During their turn, they a) explore what they might want to contribute to the vision-keeper’s project and b) note briefly anything that has come up for them personally in the process that might have to do with their own existing or future projects. Support people take turns offering listening support to one another in this round. The vision-keeper is simply ‘witnessing’ or ‘overhearing’, yet he or she still needs to be present.

During the third and final round, the vision-keeper speaks again. He or she identifies any offers of help that were shared during the second round that he or she would welcome and find useful. Any contributions that he or she would not find helpful can be “re-owned” by their originators and folded back into their own work.

The purpose of this format is to create a space for freely requesting help, for freely offering help, and for freely accepting or declining help. This three-round process allows project initiators to receive assistance with their projects while also respecting that each person who is offering support is, at the same time, the actual or potential initiator of their own projects.

I first described this format in an earlier online version of this essay, in 2004. Several years later, I discovered another contemporary hosting format which has some similarities to what I have described above, although it does not use Focusing and includes additional questions. The Pro-Action Café, developed by Ria Baeck and Rainer Leoprechting, is an exciting blend of World Café and Open Space, designed to allow a group to contribute to various members' individual projects. For more info on this, see <http://www.theworldcafecommunity.org/forum/topics/pro-action-cafe>

BUILDING COMMUNITY: Offering a “Matrix Space” for Different Kinds of Grouping

A third kind of grouping that is particularly helpful for community-building is a large, open-to-all-comers ‘matrix space.’ In some ways this is similar to the first format, as there is no expectation of everyone working on a single project. Yet it is also different in that it is designed for a substantially larger number of people and its purpose is to hold a wider space for networking and for forming many smaller groupings.

In one form of matrix space, people are invited to participate in a large circle go-round where each person gets a turn to speak briefly. Those who are already involved with specific projects can use the time to celebrate any small (or large!) successes, along with making any requests for help. Those who are interested, but not yet active with any particular project or group, are also welcome. During the circle time, they introduce themselves and speak briefly about their own feelings, motivations, and interests.

Sometimes, a matrix space might be followed by a period of time during which various smaller groupings can meet. If that is not possible, we can offer the opportunity for people to gather, at least briefly, in self-selected smaller groupings in order to exchange contact information and set a time to meet later.

Participants in a matrix space enjoy the opportunity to hear about what is happening, celebrate small steps that have been taken, make and respond to requests for help, and introduce themselves to the community. This kind of grouping, though not particularly complicated, offers great value. Even so, it still requires that the person extending the initial invitation be clear about the format and purpose of this kind of ‘coming together’.

One of the reasons I am emphasizing the importance of clarity in the original invitation is the unfortunate tendency for people to attempt to ‘hijack’ groupings that do not have a clear intention and purpose. Sometimes people find it easier to attempt to influence an already existing grouping rather than putting out their own invitation to gather. Unfortunately, this hijacking of the matrix space’s open purpose into a more limited purpose destroys the possibility of its ‘giving birth’ to any number of small groupings.

Long-time Focusing people may see some parallels between my description of a “matrix space”, and Glaser and Gendlin’s description of the original Chicago Changes group (1973). Subsequent Changes groups appear to have become spaces primarily oriented around learning and practicing Focusing, yet the original Changes model had a strong emphasis on

being a space where many smaller sub-groups, each with their own projects, were invited to form.

I personally have never had the opportunity to experience the original Chicago Changes group, yet my own experience of “matrix space” took place after September 11, 2001, in Sonoma County, California where a number of people sought a place to gather, support one another, and give birth to various and sundry initiatives in response to the needs of the time. In later conversations with Gene Gendlin, we were both struck by the parallels between the format of that generative activist space, and the original Changes group format. Many readers may also be familiar with Open Space Technology (Owen, 1992) or with Peer Conferencing (Segar, 2010). We can see these as exemplary contemporary approaches to creating other variants of “matrix space”.

LONGER-TERM GROUPINGS: “This or Something Better”

Once a number of people have been working together for a while, the need for a different kind of grouping format will often become apparent. For example, people who have been working on a project may have particular insights arising from their proximity to the work they are doing. At the same time, they may be encountering some difficulties in communicating with the founders/vision-holders.

For their part, the original vision-holders still hold a unique and highly important perspective with regard to the project. At the same time, they might begin to sense some ways in which they may be unintentionally contributing to holding the project back. This kind of situation is quite understandable and frequently encountered, though this does not make it less painful.

We already know from Focusing that it often helps to have another person in the role of “listener” for the process *within a person* to unfold. This is especially the case when we are encountering a difficult situation, or if we are wanting to access a deeper level of creativity.

Similarly, when we are working in a long-term grouping, it can often be helpful to have an ‘outside’ person take on the role of the listener. His or her ability to embody multi-partiality — the ability to empathize with all sides — allows the process *within* the grouping to better unfold. The broader perspectives and wider framing of an outside listener also provide a fresh ‘safe space’ for whatever diversity or possible paradoxes may be occurring. Hence, what had previously been experienced as conflict gets unstuck and is seen freshly as a life-giving gift.

From a Focusing perspective, we can understand the purpose of an external space-holder as allowing the life in each ‘part’ to be fully heard so that *it* can offer its gift to the larger whole. The non-directive facilitator or ‘designated listener’ is someone who is, to some degree, ‘outside’ of the immediate system so that each person in the system can be free to voice the fullness and intricacy of their own particular place within the whole.

This external person could be a professional — the equivalent of a Focusing-Oriented therapist, yet for a group rather than for a single person. However, just as we often find it helpful to have lay Focusing partners, so too we can have lay “designated listeners” who have the skills and training to hold space effectively for groupings. Dynamic Facilitation is one Focusing-friendly approach for this, accessible to both professional and lay facilitators (Zubizarreta, 2014, 2013, 2006). Like Focusing, it does require some training. Yet also like Focusing, it primarily works with the dynamics of presence, emergence, and naturally-occurring shifts.

In a situation where people have been working together for a while, having an “outside listener” does not alter the role of the vision-holders nor of the people serving in a support capacity. The process simply creates a space where everyone is able to safely ‘overhear’ one another. This structure, in turn, creates the possibility of life-forward shifts in each person with regard to the shared situation, by creating the opportunity for each person to experience the situation more fully.

In this context, the vision-keepers can experience the freedom of ‘this or something better’ with regard to their role as guardians of the vision. By participating in a facilitated process, they are inviting the possibility of a deepening or an expansion, but only if it rings true to their felt sense of the original vision.

Of course, there are also associated risks: if this kind of openness is created for a while, and then abruptly shut down, it can be very damaging to the morale of a group. On the other hand, when this kind of process is engaged in over time, it can help create a shift where each of the participants begin to “own” more of the vision, and thus the role of leadership becomes more distributed and more fluid.

WHAT NEXT?

Each of the four examples described above shares a common element: the importance of protecting each person’s connection to their own process of felt-sensing and meaning-making. At the same time, each particular format responds to a different kind of situation: from creating a container where each person can clarify his or her own vision and projects within a similar field...to obtaining help and support from others to move forward with a specific project...to creating a forum where many kinds of groupings can develop...to supporting life-forward movement within a long-term collaboration or organization.

From the practice of Focusing, we know how rich and meaningful our own personal experiencing can be. Likewise, any ‘meeting’ of two or more humans has the inherent capacity to be an extraordinary coming together, full of unique possibilities and creativity...when we are able to design and enter into the kinds of spaces that allow for the fullness of such a ‘meeting’ to take place.

Human beings are such an extraordinary unfolding...and so much remains to be explored in the interpersonal and group realms! I look forward to the gifts that your own experiencing will offer to this on-going conversation.

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