

Focusing and Me

Xu Yongwei (China) and Karen Whalen (Canada)

Xu Yongwei is a Focusing-Oriented Therapist and a Wholebody Focusing Professional Trainer. She is a psychotherapist in private practice in China. She practices Focusing-Oriented Therapy and has extensive experience of Focusing practices, most recently in Relational Wholebody Focusing and Trauma Focusing.



Finding Focusing

I still remember in 2009 reading Eugene Gendlin's *Focusing*. This was my first time hearing about this technique. I made up my mind to learn it one day. Thanks to Xu Jun and colleagues, who brought Focusing and Focusing-Oriented Therapy to China, we now have the opportunity to learn it.

I began to learn Focusing in 2011 and studied with the following Focusing teachers: Xu Jun, 吉良安之, Akira Ikemi, Ann Weiser Cornell, Karen Whalen, and Shaun and Alexandra Phillips. Looking back over these 6 years of Focusing study, I can see that I was changed from an anxious and unhappy person to becoming a healthier and happier

one. Focusing teaches me how to stay with my body sense and how to live in the present moment with a connection between ground, sky, and me. I received my FOT certification in 2014 and my WBFOT certification in 2016. I continue to study Focusing whenever a new opportunity presents itself.

Life is full of conflicts and confusion especially in this rapid and modern world. As a young woman, I worked in early childhood education and then later as a radio broadcaster. I became a therapist in 2005 because I wanted to use psychology to help myself and others have a happier life. I took the 2-year psychoanalytic

course offered by the China America Psychoanalysis Alliance (CAPA) and other psychotherapy courses. I benefited very much from all of these, but Focusing, in another way, gave me even more.

Much like ancient Chinese wisdom, Focusing emphasizes embodiment and the connection between my whole body and the whole world. Although I agree with this, I still did not know how to do it. My habitual pattern is to work primarily with my brain. But gradually I began to work also with my body. I try to clear a space, and get a felt sense of living into my whole situation. I practice slowing down, staying with the implicit, and tolerating the uncertainty. 3 years ago, I began to learn Wholebody Focusing. This practice allowed me to take a big step forward. During the first training program with Karen Whelan, I still recall giving up writing any notes. I simply sat in the classroom and followed my body's needs. After an initial 5-day course, I felt something had changed inside my whole living body experience, but I couldn't yet say what that was. Fortunately, after the training course, I had the very good opportunity to practice Wholebody Focusing with Karen every week. She is very kind and gives me lots of help.

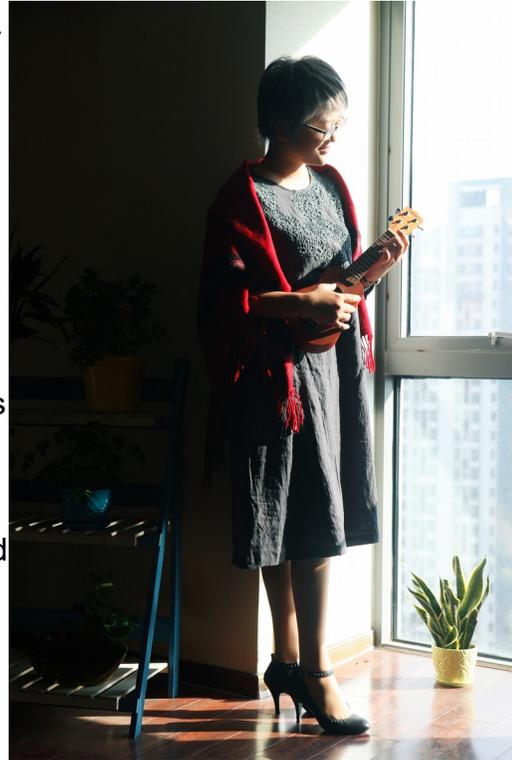
How Focusing Changed my Life

I recall during one Wholebody Focusing session with Karen. I cried long and deeply and she reminded me to pay attention to my body sensations and the environment at the same time. She invited me to observe the whole of my living experience. I looked out of the window. It was early summer. The green trees outside the window were brightly shining under the sun. I looked at them and, I don't know why, suddenly I could feel the support from them. I felt the connection with them and they all looked at me and supported me in their own way. I told Karen what I felt and she replied that everything alive in this environment is connected to me and supports us in its own way. It is a mysterious process which I may not understand but I can felt sense a bodily experience of that whole body-whole person-environment interaction. That was a very important moment for me. Since that time, I can tangibly feel the connection and support not only from people, but also from the environment.

Since then, I realize that Focusing is not just a theory. Focusing is a *living into and living forward process*, a skill I can practice with my whole body. I have practiced Wholebody Listening Partnerships frequently, including 5 times a week at one period of time, with my classmates. I enjoy it very much and I wrote down many feelings about the practice process. Unfortunately my computer was stolen one night and I lost all my records and notes. I was shocked and saddened by this loss. But this event let me understand one thing: The only secure place is inside my own living body. Now my goal is to make the Focusing way a lifestyle, and not only a technique that I use in my office. Not only do I

practice it with my classmates or with my clients, but I also practice it every day. Whenever I get up or go to bed or play my instrument or paint or any time when I remember to connect, I consciously tune into a felt sense of my living body of wholeness.

Through these practices, I have become calmer, more stable and more sensitive to my body. I'm less angry, sad and confused. I feel more self-confident and happy. Wholebody Focusing emphasizes Me Here connected with the 5 body spaces: my physical body as a whole, my inner energetic felt sensing body, Me with other people, Me connected with my environment, and the sum total of these four which offers me an experience of a much larger Me Here, the connected and transpersonal self that lives as part of a much larger ecological whole. I am part of the whole living system, no longer alone and separate. This connection lets me feel my world as more vivid. I enjoy this world more including its people, nature, and other things. This connection lets me feel more grounded. Grounded Presence lets me feel the strength and realness of each present moment.



I represent all of these Focusing practices with two Chinese characters: one is 可, meaning *permission* and the other is 如, meaning *as it is*. I give my permission to all things as they are. This is my sense of how Focusing touches my life in simple yet profound ways. People struggle a lot, often because they don't want to accept things as they are. Accepting and saying a whole body YES to reality is the first step towards change.

A Focusing Trainer is Born

During the past couple of years, I have held more than 20 salons to introduce Focusing in my city of Wuxi, a medium-sized city near Shanghai. Most of the people attending my salon are female psychology enthusiasts in their 20s to 40s. During the Salon I tell the story about how Focusing was established by Gene Gendlin. Then I guide people to have their own taste of Focusing. I use diverse methods which are enjoyable for new learners such as painting, dancing, music or other games, to give people a direct experience of the felt sense and felt shift. We also explore many universal human topics and then use the

Focusing way to find new perspectives and propose possible solutions.

Most recently I initiated a new Focusing experience group with 10 members. I do not teach theory or method to them. Rather, I facilitate a safe space in which members can directly experience a Focusing space by interacting in a group process.

Example of a Group Activity:

I invite each participant to move around the teaching space and allow their body to sit at different locations in the room, sensing into their particular place, finding just the right comfortable place. This group activity gives people an experience of their body feeling into the environment. Participants become freshly aware of their body's sensitivity and receptivity in connection with the space and other class members. When we complete the activity and share what happened just now, many members are surprised to discover that different parts of the class space give them very different feelings. This activity familiarizes the student with subtle bodily sensations and a whole body felt sense of a common everyday situation: Me Here inside of this particular space. Over time, by practicing many different felt sensing exercises, students learn to trust their own inner lived experience of everyday life.

I continue looking for ways to help people who do not know Focusing to learn this skill to explore their inner world and to gain psychological growth. It is really a method of self-awareness and self-healing. The feedback from my students is very positive. Many members are using the practice in their own lives and they happily find it does help!

As a therapist I also use Wholebody Focusing in my clinical practice. Focusing helps me to not only use my brain in a session, but also my body. I invite my clients to connect to their whole body awareness as part of the whole situation-interaction with me, the therapist. The effect is very noticeable. In a broad sense, Focusing-Oriented Therapies help clients connect with the implicit edge that is emerging, verbalizing or symbolizing it, and finally reflecting upon their difficulties and struggles in a whole and deeply connected way.

I use Focusing to improve the quality of my daily life and to grow at the edge of my therapy skills with clients. I hope to engage in more teaching in China so that more people come to know and use Focusing to improve the quality of their lives. I am forever grateful to all of my Focusing teachers and mentors.

Xu Yongwei, Wuxi, Jiangsu, China, June 17, 2017

Karen's Response to Yongwei

Karen Whalen is a Wholebody Focusing Certifying Coordinator and Psychotherapist in private practice in Canada. She offers training programs in Relational Wholebody Focusing worldwide.



When I first arrived in China, I felt overwhelmed by Shanghai, a city whose population is the same as the whole of my native Canada. I was afraid and a little worried about how Wholebody Focusing would be received. I was also afraid and stressed by how I would be received. I have learned from Focusing to give voice to my fears and stresses, that when I do this, they already begin to transform themselves. I shared my fears with the first person I met in China, Li Ming. He is there to meet my plane each time I arrive. He received my worries with gentleness and

wisdom: *“Ah yes, this is a human response. I too am a little nervous and worried about meeting you, a teacher from the West”*. A natural heartfelt connection was made at the first point of contact.

During my first teaching event in Shanghai, over three years ago now, my translator Ji Lilian sat to my right; Yongwei sat to my left. I was struck by how forthright and real my students were. There seemed to be space to simply be a person in a real situation, including my fears and nervousness and theirs. Something quite unexpected and, well, magical, began to happen whenever I entered a shared field of interaction with them.

Yongwei was shy and respectful at first, yet vibrantly alive; she was a genuine person and also a little stressed and worried about connecting to me. It seemed that my own fears and worries were also mirrored by hers. Would the teacher want to connect with me? Will we find ways to explore our connection in a Wholebody Focusing way?

Over the past three years I have visited Yongwei in her home. I continue to meet her twice every week to exchange a mandarin lesson for some Wholebody Focusing time. We recently co-authored an important article about treating complex trauma using Relational Wholebody Focusing-Oriented Therapy in Hong Kong and in Mainland China. We co-presented a workshop on the practice of Relational Wholebody Focusing at the international conference in Cambridge last

year. We continue to discover more and more inspiring forward movement steps rising up between us.

For me, it seems that the Focusing way and the Focusing attitude create important bridges for human connection to happen in a living way that has meaning for both our lives. I am grateful for this friendship with Yongwei and many other Chinese students who have become my colleagues and my teachers. I feel privileged to have this opportunity to forge new bonds of friendship that ripple out into the larger human community.

Karen Whalen, Nova Scotia, Canada, June 17, 2017