

Focusing Research Group, July 2016 Report

Beatrice Blake

Members: Beatrice Blake (US), Calliope Callias (US), João Fonseca (Portugal), Charles Herr (US), Jim Iberg (US), Kevin Krycka (US), Alex Maunder (UK).

Objectives

- legitimize and aid in the adoption of Focusing
- be able to approach funding sources that demand evidence-based research
- use or invent measuring instruments that reflect the true nature of Focusing and Gendlin's philosophy
- find ways for our community to engage in Citizen Science regarding the benefits of Focusing
- encourage PhD students and academics to do Focusing research

To “build a current corpus of research validating the effectiveness of Focusing in multiple contexts” is a strategic goal of TFI. Since most Focusing research has been done in psychotherapy, we are particularly interested in research outside of the therapy room. We are working to develop procedures for effective qualitative and quantitative measurement.

Citizen Science for Trainers and FOTs

We explored several well-known and well-validated scales and settled on the [Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale](#), used worldwide to evaluate programs that aim to influence mental well-being. WEMWBS has proven to be sensitive to individual changes. In Beatrice's 6-week online course, all WEMWBS scores went up from 2 to 10 points, with an average of 5.11 points.

We also developed a questionnaire that can be used with participants in Level One focusing sessions. The Focusing Elements questionnaire¹ and the WEMWBS should be administered immediately before the first focusing class, immediately after the last class and then again six months later.

Pooling data

Large numbers of participants are needed for meaningful data analysis of Focusing outcomes. A significant quantitative research study requires a minimum of 300 participants. Focusing Trainers and FOTs from around the world can reach that level by using the same questionnaires and pooling our data through ClientRecords.co.uk. ClientRecords already uses the WEMWBS, and will add the Focusing Elements scale if we decide to proceed.

Neuroscience

SPECT scans were performed in a pilot study by Alex Maunder on a single client after one Whole Body Focusing session and again after two years of sessions. The scans showed evidence of major neuroplasticity in the temporal lobes and minor positive changes elsewhere. Alex is soliciting major research institutions in the UK and USA to support further research. Find out more from alex.maunder4@gmail.com and www.wholebodyfocusing.org

Personal EEG Devices: Although not as valued for research as MRIs, personal brainwave devices are much less expensive and can show brainwave changes that happen during focusing partnership. Many studies have been done on Mindfulness with EEG devices. We could possibly show the changes that happen in the EEG when people focus on problems instead of letting them go as is done in meditation. The Mindwave Mobile headset and Myndplay Pro Research Tools are available for £189 (US\$250).

Proposed Fordham Study: Drs. Warren Tryon and David Marquette of Fordham University approached TFI wanting to study fMRI scans of the abdomen during Focusing possibly revealing activity of the enteric nervous system. When they find funding, they will require volunteer focusers from the NYC area.

New horizons for the Experiencing Scale

Recent studies have shown that Level 6 of the EXP scale makes for 20 to 27 times more success in therapy, even in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Recent FOT Research

Focusing-oriented-experiential psychotherapy: From research to practice by Akira Ikemi and Kevin Krycka includes a summary of the research done on FOT since the 2002 review conducted by Mary Hendricks. They discuss the philosophical basis for FOT, and include transcripts from key points of client sessions to help illuminate the principles discussed.

Working definitions of Focusing terms

Based on Akira and Kevin's efforts to relate research terms to the philosophy of the implicit, we have developed working definitions for the following terms:

Experiencing is a continuous interactional process that involves yourself and your environment (i.e., your physical context, personal history, biology and relationships). It is pre-symbolic by nature, i.e. before the formation of thoughts, emotions, or words. Human experiencing is more complex and intricate than any words can describe – a vast inner territory that can be intentionally moved into using processes such as Focusing.

The *felt sense* is the bodily sense of the experiencing of the present moment, or the sense of a whole situation, not of a particular thought or feeling about it. The felt sense is on the border zone between the pre-symbolic and symbolic. Because the felt sense is not yet clearly articulated, it is often unnoticed in conversation or dismissed as something inconsequential. A felt sense might be a funny or odd feeling one has about a concern that emerges when one struggles for words. The felt sense may also be present when one encounters a wordlessness or sense of being stuck. This wordless experience is rich territory for Focusing.

Focusing is accessing bodily experiencing by pausing to allow a felt sense to form, attending to it and following it, without self-judgment and without suggesting any particular psychological or behavioral outcome. The felt shift is the result of this process.

A *felt shift* is when we are able to symbolize that which was previously preverbal and pre-conceptual in experiencing. By attending to the felt sense, the pre-

conceptual meaning comes into focus. As a result of this, the felt sense changes, and the whole situation feels different.

¹ Proposed Focusing Elements Questionnaire:

- I pause in difficult situations
- I note difficult feelings without judging myself or others
- I pay attention to needs and values when conflict arises
- I have an attitude of curiosity and interest in my inner world
- I welcome feelings that are not easy to put into words
- I listen to others without interrupting or giving advice
- I sense not just the words but the meaning of what others are saying
- I trust my inner wisdom to find my way forward
- I notice where feelings are held in my body

Then a written question:

- Pre: “As a result of taking this course, I would like to address these three problems in my life...”
- Post: “As a result of taking this course, I have experienced the following three changes”.

Each questionnaire should contain demographic information: age, gender identification, level of education, location, length of course taken (number of hours), whether it is in person or online, name of course taken, and the teacher.

For further information or to participate, please contact <mailto:beablake7@gmail.com>