

From: [Frans Depestele](#)
Sent: Tuesday, July 13, 2010 10:50 PM
Subject: the book and the conference

Dear [...],

I want to share with you, as one of the editors, some deep concerns about the new book published by the WAPCEPC 'Person-centered and experiential therapies work' (published just before the PCE conference in Rome), a book in which much research is collected to show that PCE therapies work. I had already read main parts of the book in the days before the conference.

On the one hand, the book makes me happy because many research findings are brought together, to prove that PCE is equally good as, for example, CBT.

On the other hand, the book makes me unhappy. On many pages the margins are full of my remarks. In the book I find nothing about what I am daily studying intensively and practicing and writing in the domain of focusing-experiential-therapy and therapy in general. That is very disappointing.

What makes me really unhappy is that our orientation, the focusing-experiential orientation, is nearly completely absent in this book, except one page on focusing and one page on the experiencing scale. Not a single chapter written by our people, no representative in the editorial board, no research (a number of survey publications is only mentioned) on focusing-oriented-therapy and on focusing (the 'Gendlin line').

The whole book is a story of the classical person-centered therapy (the 'Rogers line') together with the emotion-focused therapy (the 'Greenberg line'). For example, in the index the term 'felt sense' is not mentioned while the terms 'emotion' and 'emotional' take up half a page. Also the term body, in the sense of 'experiential body', is missing.

In the concluding chapter, for example, written by you, [...] and [...], you only speak about the classical person-centered therapy and about the emotion-focused therapy. Nothing is said about the contributions of our orientation. What happened with our orientation in the concluding chapter seems to be a 'symptom' of what happened with our orientation throughout the whole book, beginning with the choice of the editorial board.

Also at the conference itself, in the collective presentations about theoretical or other issues, we saw the same 'pattern'. For example, on July 1st there was a symposium with as subject 'Identifying the common ground between the experiential and the person-centered approaches in PCEP'. As speakers there was one representative of the classical

personcentered approach (Zucconi), and three speakers of the emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, Elliott & Watson). No one was invited of our approach. Nevertheless the focusing oriented 'tribe', with Gendlin and since Gendlin, has done a considerable work of thinking and writing about what the essence of therapy is.

This was not the only example of the 'pattern' at the conference. We saw it in all the other (5 or 6) collective presentations. At the conference there were only duo's formed by classical personcentered people and EFT people. No one together with focusing-experiential-therapy people. The duo classical-personcentered-and-EFT dominated the conference. It became the image of the conference.

In this context I must bring to the notice the fact that we have not a single representative at the Board of the WAPCEPC nor in the editorial board of the journal. In both we see the same pattern that I described above: classical personcentered people and EFT people. Nevertheless we have many capable people who are able to be in these boards.

While the WAPCEPC says that it takes care that all orientations must be represented at all levels (e.g. scientific committees), I have a strong sense that forces are at work to exclude the focusing-experiential orientation. This is a shocking and painful realization.

I want to explain why I find these 'politics' so wrong. The focusing-experiential orientation is one of the strongest 'tribes' of the PCE family, if not the strongest. We have a whole range of very capable people in all departments: theory, research, philosophy of psychotherapy theory, and many different areas of application of our practice. We have invaluable things to say about therapy and therapeutic practice. A huge number of the focusing trainers who are a member of The Focusing Institute (about 900) are therapists.

It is poignant that most PCE people don't seem to have any idea about what is going on in our movement. Each year there is an international focusing conference, where therapy contributions and also research findings are presented. Last year we also had an international therapy conference. In all our conferences and meetings I experience and see everywhere how the person-centered attitudes and values are basic in our communications.

In 2009 the international focusing conference was in Japan. In Japan focusing-oriented psychotherapy and focusing are taught at 25 universities by more than 40 teachers. Much research is done by them and keeps going on. Some of it has been presented at that conference, a.o. new research with the experiencing scale. And much

other work. Akira Ikemi, Shoji Murayama, Yoshimi Ito and Mako Hikasa have a survey of the research in Japan.

At The Focusing Institute Doralee Grindler Katonah coordinated some of the research. She herself did research on focusing with cancer patients; also Diane Bourbonnais from Canada did such research.

In Germany Hejo Feuerstein (university of Karlsruhe) together with Dieter Müller did research on the healing effect of their programm on chronic pain, research they needed to be accepted by the insurance companies.

Speaking about 'effectiveness beyond psychotherapy' (cf chapter 3 of your book), focusing is taught in schools, even to small children. On many places in the world: Argentina, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, The Netherlands. The results are amazing. Research is done and more is coming.

Speaking about empowerment and politics – the theme of the conference - the focusing experiential orientation has projects in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and El Salvador.

Focusing is used to develop and to facilitate creative thinking. A method is developed to teach these abilities: 'Thinking at the edge' (TAE). This is taught a.o. at universities, for example in München. Satoko Tokumaru teaches it in Tokyo to university students (she did research on these applications), and she helps PhD students with TAE.

Now I want to explain why I am convinced that our orientation should have had a space in your book. We have very important theoretical work as well as research work. First the theoretical work. A specific view on the therapy process may give a specific view and understanding of research findings. Our theory helps explaining findings in a specific way.

We should have had a space to present basic elements of our theory, where they are relevant for research. For example, in the book the crucial distinction between an emotion and a felt sense is not made. They are different in more than ten respects. Calling everything an emotion is, I feel, not correct with regard to the scientist who found this specific area (felt sense) in the experiencing and gave it this specific name. Not making this distinction leads, in my opinion, to errors, like substituting the term felt sense for the term emotion in the description of the experiencing scale at p. 169.

Having one of our representatives in the editorial board could have helped to prevent smaller and greater inadequacies in certain descriptions. In the book focusing is not always explained correctly. For example, symbolizing a felt sense is not labelling it

(as I read somewhere in the book). It also could have helped to prevent some missings: the concept ‘felt sense’ and ‘experiential body’.

A second main reason why, I think, we should have had a space in the book is to have the opportunity to present our research. Such a presentation should have been made by (or together with) people of the focusing-experiential orientation itself. In the book our research is hidden away in a list of people who have summarized it (p. 150); it is not at all explained and elaborated.

We should have had a space to present our research and to explain it, beginning with the research that led to the development of focusing and its essential role in clientcentered therapy (carefully explained by Purton, 2004). Focusing makes clientcentered therapy work, focusing makes the basic relational attitudes work, i.e. a specific kind of reflecting is necessary at the client’s side, a specific kind of attending to one’s experiencing and a specific kind of symbolizing it. It is this specific, own experiential inner work of the client, within the relational attitudes of the therapist, that makes therapy work.

Such a chapter also could have presented all the other research that has been done by our people over the years – unpacking the surveys and presenting the material itself - and also the new research findings of the last years in the diverse areas of activity of the focusing community (see above).

Other reasons why we did need a place in the book: Our theory can explain in a unique way some important research findings. About self-healing (Bohart), we would say: The ‘body’ cures itself ... with the right environment’.

Our theory has important things to say about another finding. In the last chapter of the book expressive writing is depreciatory put aside as an “alternative practice” (p. 245) – in contrast with Bohart on p. 99-100. In this respect I want to note that in a meta-analysis of randomized studies (Frattaroli, 2006) expressive writing (also called emotional disclosure) is found to have a positive effect on (13 subcategories of) psychological health and on (16 subcategories of) physiological functioning (p. 841). Of these 16 subcategories only the immune parameters subcategory was significant in a random effects analysis. Lutgendorf has shown with the experiencing scale that the more experiential the writing is the greater the effect is (this fact is mentioned on p. 170 of your book but without specifics and without the original references). One point is that these facts cannot be understood throughout without the focusing-experiential-theory of change. Another point is that this shows that research may not only be research on relationship-ingredients of therapy but also on reflection-ingredients, i.e. the client’s own reflective and symbolizing work.

The fact that our orientation didn't get an opportunity to write such chapters is unacceptable for me. We are set aside in all fields. Of our thinking, of our practice: nothing gets a chance.

Some people – a minority, I think - want to exclude our tribe from the PCE. Focusing is not person-centered, they say. They cannot accept our existence. We have to disappear. In this book, I am afraid, things go in that direction. At the conference after the keynote address of Akira Ikemi and the clear response of the audience in the long applause, the persons in charge came on stage to make ... announcements, not to thank Akira.

I know the focusing-experiential family very very well. I am afraid that the bond with the PCE is fizzling out. We have an enormous potential of very capable therapists; they are not found. At the conference there was only a handful of them among the participants. Besides Akira's keynote there were only six contributions by our people.

There is so much in our movement and so much potentiality in working together with the PCE, but it seems impossible.

(I send a copy of this letter to Mary Hendricks, director of The Focusing Institute; to Jeffrey Cornelius-White, former chairman of the WAPCEPC; to Germain Lietaer, former Belgian member of the board of the WAPCEPC; and to Mathias Dekeyser, chairman of the VVCEPC, the Flemish association for clientcentered-experiential psychotherapy and counseling)

With my best regards,

Frans

Frans Depestele, MD, MA
Psychiatrist-psychotherapist
Master in Philosophy
Grotstraat 100
B-3200 Aarschot
Belgium
frans.depestele@skynet.be